



# POOR PEOPLE

## FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

TRANSLATED BY HUGH APLIN

ONE WORLD CLASSICS



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Fyodor Dostoevsky

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ONEWORLD CLASSICS LTD

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## Introduction

In her letter dated 1st July the heroine of this short novel uses a Russian phrase which is ultimately untranslatable, the insurmountable difficulty lying in the two alternative meanings of the word *dobro*, both of which make sense in the context. The phrase either means “to do good” or “to create wealth”. As well as setting a frustrating puzzle for the translator, this ambiguity – which is suggestively combined with the word *selo*, “village”, in the heroine’s surname too – encapsulates the mixture of social and moral themes in Dostoevsky’s first published work in much the same way as does the title. For – thankfully just as in English too this time – the Russian adjective *bedny*, “poor”, can imply both material poverty and spiritual, moral impoverishment, either of which conditions might provoke pity.

The most obvious level on which the novel operates is probably that of the crusading social manifesto. Dostoevsky depicts protagonists who exist in penury in the hard heart of a nineteenth-century metropolis. The reader cannot help but be moved by the plight of Varvara Dobroselova and Makar Devushkin, authors of the letters that form the bulk of the text, as well as of the other figures, such as Gorshkov and Pokrovsky, whose stories echo to one degree or another those of the central characters. Certainly this was the main reason for the critical acclaim the work initially attracted. But the author equally shows that material comfort is not all a human being needs to achieve spiritual peace. One of the ironies of the closing pages is that just as things seem to be improving materially for a number of the characters, so the spiritual fabric of their lives comes apart. The welfare state can provide people with a decent income, accommodation, an education, but not with the less tangible factors that arguably contribute still more to contentment such as requited love, the respect of other men, or a sense of personal dignity. “What does honour matter,” asks the hack novelist Ratazyayev, “when you’ve nothing to eat?” The great novelist Dostoevsky would without doubt reply: “It matters a great deal.”

Yet as well as functioning on these social and spiritual planes, *Poor People* is a work much concerned with things literary. Indeed, a proper understanding of Dostoevsky's purpose is impossible without some knowledge of the literary context, for the work is highly allusive in its content. The title itself is a clear reference to the best-known story by Nikolai Karamzin, belletrist and historian, the man lauded by Alexander Pushkin in 1822 as Russia's finest writer of prose. 'Poor Liza', published in 1792, was his best-selling sentimental tale of the seduction and abandonment by a well-connected young man of an innocent peasant girl. The sad story ends with her suicide and the tears of the compassionate reader. Pushkin's praise for Karamzin was modified by his recognition of the dearth of competition in prose fiction, but by the 1830s the great poet had dethroned his predecessor by producing outstanding short stories of his own. In 'The Queen of Spades' Pushkin created his own "poor Liza", an orphaned ward who is jilted without even being seduced, yet finally makes a profitable marriage. Before this, however, Pushkin had already published *The Tales of Belkin*, a collection which in *Poor People* is sent by Varvara to Devushkin, arousing his great enthusiasm for the story 'The Postmaster'. What Devushkin does not realize as he praises the authenticity of Pushkin's portrait of one of life's "humiliated and insulted", is that Pushkin was here giving an ironic rereading of Karamzin. Pushkin has "poor Dunya", the daughter of the eponymous station master, quite willingly seduced by a wealthy young man, but this time there is no abandonment; rather it is Dunya's father, assuming she will come to a bad end, who turns to drink and dies. Devushkin's delight at the story is prompted by his recognition of himself in the figure of the postmaster and by the sympathy the latter elicits from the narrator. But being an unsophisticated reader, Devushkin does not appreciate all the parallels between the situations of Dunya and his own protégée, Varvara, and he certainly does not understand the irony in Pushkin's depiction of tragic delusion.

The other work that has a profound effect on Devushkin is Gogol's short story 'The Greatcoat'. Here too he recognizes a portrait of himself in the figure of the impecunious copying clerk who is obliged at the cost of great hardship to buy a new coat to keep out the winter cold of St Petersburg. Unfortunately this adored new possession is immediately stolen, the clerk's feeble plea to his superior for justice is

cruelly rejected, and after a brief delirium filled with unseemly language and insubordination, the sad creature dies. While Devushkin fails to grasp all the moral issues raised by this complex tale, he clearly recognizes the way the clerk Bashmachkin (his name based on a Russian word meaning “shoe”) is mocked by both his peers and the narrator. He naively supposes that the author has spied on him, and is amazed that his own superior has allowed such a scurrilous work to be published.

Had he been one of Dostoevsky’s readers, Devushkin would presumably have been much happier with the way that the younger writer presented a poor copying clerk, for in *Poor People* Dostoevsky clearly intended to make a polemical response to ‘The Greatcoat’. The thrust of his new, more sympathetic approach lay in the humanization of his central protagonist, along with a more realistic depiction of his situation. Gogol’s Bashmachkin spends the bare minimum until the purchase of the fateful greatcoat, so why is he penniless? Dostoevsky’s Devushkin uses most of his income either on supporting and entertaining Varvara, or on drowning his sorrows. Bashmachkin’s love is for a mere item of clothing, Devushkin’s is for a friendless orphan. Even their names are contrasting, Gogol’s degrading derivation from *bashmak*, “shoe”, giving way to Dostoevsky’s sympathetic derivation from *devushka*, “young girl” (also contrasted in the novel with the name of the odious Bykov, “Mr Bull”). Perhaps most importantly of all, Dostoevsky gives the humble copying clerk a voice. Bashmachkin is scarcely able to form a coherent sentence and his writing never progresses beyond the stage of copying official documents. By contrast, Devushkin, who enjoys copying works of literature too, is moreover a writer himself, the author of letters to his beloved Varvara, a man who muses on his own potential as a writer and takes pride in the development of his prose style.

Not that he writes well. His prose, even at its best, is littered with the meaningless particles that typify the speech of Gogol’s character too, and his generally unsophisticated, colloquial language is enriched only by occasional elements of bureaucratic jargon or purple prose that he has picked up in the course of his copying tasks. When he is agitated or drunk, his language at times deteriorates to the point of incoherence. Gogol and others had already used non-literary narrators to good effect before Dostoevsky, but the latter’s sustained and

psychologically grounded deployment of his character's voice was unprecedented and remains a brilliant achievement.

Unlike Devushkin's, Varvara's writing is generally controlled and relatively educated in style, yet nonetheless at times betrays her youth, with its emotional outbursts, self-absorption and impulsiveness. She is a more discerning reader than her friend and is already a practised writer before their correspondence begins: indeed her memoirs of her idyllic childhood in the country and first hard years in the city might even suggest literary aspirations at a time when women writers were just beginning to make their mark in Russia.

A further voice heard in the novel, albeit an insincere one, is that of Ratazyayev, extracts from whose writings are paraded by the admiring Devushkin. Dostoevsky has Ratazyayev imitating the comic style of Gogol as well as the manner of the society tale and the historical novel, each spiced up with touches of the overblown Romanticism then in vogue in Russia. His praise for these passages again demonstrates Devushkin's naivety, and they are amusing pastiches in themselves, but they also hint briefly at how the central relationships of *Poor People* might have been presented in the literary styles of the previous decade. Dostoevsky demonstrated his rejection of such clichéd forms by turning back further still beyond Romantic fashion and reviving the epistolary novel, simultaneously refreshing the outdated genre by having as correspondents not the customary idle, educated aristocrats, but poverty-stricken tenement-dwellers.

In general, the epistolary form more readily associated with the eighteenth century here disguises a novel with concerns very much of Dostoevsky's own age. Complex psychological insights accompany acute social observation in an oppressive urban environment – St Petersburg itself is a vital element in a story which could not have been set elsewhere – in a way that in many respects prefigures his great novels of the 1860s and beyond. *Poor People* reveals a youthful Dostoevsky making a debut that owed much to what had gone before in Russian culture, but at the same time offering tantalizing glimpses of the mature artist who would profoundly influence much of what was to follow him throughout the literary world.

– Hugh Aplin



## Poor People

*Oh, I'm sick of these storytellers!  
Rather than write something improving, pleasant,  
something that makes you feel good, they just  
dig up all the dirt from under the ground!...  
They ought to be banned from writing!  
I mean, what a disgrace: you're reading...  
and you unwittingly fall into thought –  
and then all sorts of rubbish gets into your head;  
truly, I'd ban them from writing;  
I really would simply ban them altogether.*

– Prince V.F. Odoevsky<sup>\*</sup>

My priceless Varvara Alexeyevna!

Yesterday I was happy, exceedingly happy, impossibly happy! For just once in your life, you stubborn girl, you did as I asked. In the evening, at about eight o'clock, I wake up (you know, my dear, how I like to have a little sleep for an hour or two after work), I've got out a candle, I'm getting the papers ready, sharpening my quill, and suddenly, by chance, I raise my eyes – and truly, my heart just started leaping! So you really did understand what it was I wanted, what my little heart wanted! I see the corner of the curtain at your window is folded back and attached to the pot of balsam in just exactly the way I was hinting to you that time, and straight away it seemed to me that your little face appeared for a moment at the window too, and that you too were looking in my direction from your little room, that you too were thinking of me. And how upset I was, sweetheart, that I couldn't get a good look at your pretty little face! There was a time when we could see clearly too, my dear. It's no fun getting old, my darling! Even now everything looks blurred to my eyes; you just do a little bit of work in the evening, do a bit of writing, and in the morning your eyes are all red, and the tears are flowing, and so you even feel ashamed sometimes in front of strangers. But anyway, in my imagination your little smile simply shone out, my little angel, your kind, friendly little smile, and in my heart there was just the same feeling as that time I kissed you, Varenka – do you remember, my little angel? Do you know, sweetheart, it even seemed to me that you wagged your finger at me? Is that right, you naughty girl? Be sure to describe it all in lots of detail in your letter.

Well, and what about our little idea for your curtain, Varenka? It's really nice, isn't it? Whether I'm sitting working, or going to bed, or waking up, I know for sure that you're thinking of me over there too, you remember me, and you yourself are well and cheerful. If you lower the curtain, that means – "Goodbye, Makar Alexeyevich, it's time for bed!" If you raise it, that means – "Good morning, Makar Alexeyevich, how did you sleep", or – "How are you health-wise, Makar Alexeyevich? So far as I'm concerned, thank God, I'm healthy and well!" You see, my poppet, how well thought out it all is, and letters aren't needed! Cunning, isn't it? And the idea was mine, wasn't it? What do you think, am I good at this sort of thing, Varvara

Alexeyevna?

I can report to you, my dear, Varvara Alexeyevna, that I slept this last night in good order, contrary to expectations, and I'm very pleased about that; although in new accommodation, when you've just moved in, it's never easy to sleep somehow; there's always something that's not quite right! I got up this morning fresh as a daisy – it was a real pleasure! What a lovely morning it was today, my dear! Our window was wide open; the sun's shining, the little birds are chirping, the air is full of the smells of spring, and the whole of nature is coming to life – well, and everything else was in accordance too; everything in order, spring-like. I even did quite a nice little bit of dreaming today, and all my dreams were about you, Varenka. I compared you with a little bird of the heavens, created for the delight of men and the adornment of nature. And then, Varenka, I thought that we too, people who live in care and worry, should also envy the carefree and innocent happiness of the birds of the heavens – well, and all the rest likewise, and the same; that is, I kept making such remote comparisons. I've got this book, Varenka, and it's got the same stuff in it, all the same things described in real detail. What I'm getting at is that there are different dreams, you know, my dear. And now it's spring, so my ideas too are always so nice, sharp, inventive, and the dreams I have are tender; everything is rose-coloured. That's why I've written all this; but actually I got it all from the book. There the author discloses the very same desire in verse and writes –

*Why not a bird am I, a predatory bird!*

Well, etc. There are various other ideas there too, but so be it! Where was it you went this morning, though, Varvara Alexeyevna? I wasn't yet getting ready to go to work, but you, exactly like a little spring birdie, you fluttered out of your room and crossed the courtyard so nice and cheerful. How cheerful I felt looking at you! Ah, Varenka, Varenka! Don't be sad; tears can't help your grief; that I know, my dear, that I know from experience. You're so at peace now, and you're a little better in your health. Well, how's your Fedora? Ah, what a kind woman she is! Write to me, Varenka, about what it's like living there with her now and about whether you're happy with everything. Fedora can be a bit grumpy, but pay no attention to that, Varenka. So be it! She's so kind.

I've already written to you about Tereza over here – a kind and true woman as well. But how worried I was about our letters! How would they be passed on? And then to our good fortune the Lord went and sent Tereza. She's a kind woman, meek, wordless. But our landlady is pitiless. She keeps her working like an old rag or something.

Well, and what a dump I've ended up in, Varvara Alexeyevna! Well, what accommodation! After all, I lived the life of a hermit before, peaceful and quiet; sometimes there'd be a fly in my room and you could hear it flying. But here there's noise, shouting, uproar! You don't know how everything's arranged here yet though, do you? Imagine something like a long corridor, utterly dark and dirty. Along its right-hand side is a blank wall, while on the left there's door after door, like hotel rooms, all stretching out in a row. Well, and people rent these sort of hotel rooms, and in each of them there's a single room, and people live sometimes two, sometimes three to a room. Don't ask about for any order – it's like Noah's ark! But actually they seem to be good people, all the educated, learned type. There's one civil servant (his job's something to do with literature), he's a well-read man; he talks about Homer, and about Brambeus,\* and about various authors they have, he talks about everything – he's a clever man! There are two officers living here and they're always playing cards. A midshipman lives here; and an English teacher lives here. Hang on, I'll amuse you, my dear; I'll describe them in a future letter satirically, that is, what they're like individually, in full detail. Our landlady – a very small, dirty old woman – goes about all day wearing slippers and a housecoat and keeps shouting all day at Tereza. I live in the kitchen, although it will be much more correct to put it like this: there is one room here alongside the kitchen (and you should note that our kitchen is clean, bright and very nice), a small room, a modest little corner... that is, or to put it even better, the kitchen is large, with three windows, and along the perpendicular wall I have a partition, so that it works out as if there were another room, a supernumerary room; everything's spacious, convenient, and there's a window and everything – in a word, everything's convenient. Well, that's my little corner. Well, and don't you go thinking, my dear, that there might be something else going on and there might be some secret significance; that, you know, the kitchen! That is, perhaps I do indeed live in this room behind the partition, but that's all right; I live

separately from everyone else, I live in a small way, nice and quiet. I've put a bed in my room, a table, a chest of drawers, a couple of chairs, I've hung up an icon. True, there is accommodation that's better – maybe much better – but convenience is the main thing; after all, I've done it all for convenience, and don't you go thinking it's for anything else. Your little window is opposite, across the courtyard, and the courtyard's narrow, I can see you passing – everything's more cheerful for hapless old me, and cheaper too. The worst room here, with board, costs thirty-five paper roubles. I can't afford it! But my accommodation costs me seven paper roubles, and board is five silver roubles:<sup>\*</sup> that's twenty-four roubles and fifty copecks, whereas I was paying exactly thirty before, but had to deny myself a lot of things; I didn't always drink tea, but now I've saved enough for tea and for sugar. You know, my dear, it's shameful somehow not drinking tea; the people here are all well-to-do, so it's shameful. You drink it for the sake of other people, Varenka, for show, for tone, but it's all the same to me, I'm not choosy. Put it like this: will there be much left for pocket money – and you always need some: there's boots and clothes? And that's my whole salary. I don't complain, I'm satisfied. It's enough. It's been enough for several years now; there are bonuses sometimes too. Well, goodbye, my angel. I bought a couple of pots of balsam and a geranium – cheaply. Perhaps you like mignonette? There's mignonette too, you just write; yes, write about everything in as much detail as possible, you know? And by the way, don't go thinking anything and having doubts, my dear, about me and my renting a room like this. No, it was convenience that made me do it, and convenience alone that seduced me. I mean, I'm saving money, my dear, putting it aside; I've got a little money. Pay no attention to the fact that I'm so quiet, that I look as if a fly could break me with its wing. No, my dear, I'm nobody's fool, and my character is absolutely as it should be in a man of a firm and placid nature. Goodbye, my angel! I've covered almost two whole sheets in writing to you, and should have gone to work ages ago. I kiss your little fingers, my dear, and remain

Your most humble servant and most faithful friend,  
Makar Devushkin

PS: One request: reply, my angel, in as much detail as possible. I'm

sending you a pound of sweets with this, Varenka; you eat them and enjoy them, and for God's sake don't worry about me and don't hold anything against me. Well, so it's goodbye then, my dear.

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

Do you know that I shall finally be obliged to fall out with you completely? I swear to you, kind Makar Alexeyevich, that it is even hard for me to accept your gifts. I know what they cost you, what deprivations, and how you deny yourself the most essential things. How many times have I told you that I need nothing, absolutely nothing; that I don't have the power to repay you even for those benefactions that you have scattered upon me up until now? And why do I need these pots? Well, the balsam may be another matter, but why the geranium? One only has to say a single incautious little word, like about this geranium, for example, and you are sure to buy it straight away; and it's probably expensive, isn't it? How delightful the flowers on it are! Crimson with little crosses. Where did you find such a pretty geranium? I've put it in the middle of the window where it can best be seen, and on the floor I'll put a bench, and on the bench I'll put some more flowers; only let me get rich myself! Fedora is quite overjoyed; it's like paradise in our room now – clean and bright! Well, and why the sweets? And truly, I guessed at once from your letter that something was wrong with you – paradise, and spring, and fragrances flying about, and birds chirping. What's this, I thought, surely there won't be verse here as well? For it really is true, verse is the one thing that's lacking in your letter, Makar Alexeyevich! Tender feelings, and rose-coloured dreams – it's all there! I didn't even think about the curtain; it must have got hooked up itself when I was rearranging the pots; there you are!

Ah, Makar Alexeyevich! Whatever you say, however you calculate your income to deceive me, to demonstrate that absolutely all of it is spent on you alone, still you cannot conceal or hide anything from me. It's clear that you deprive yourself of essentials because of me. Whatever put it into your head, for example, to rent such accommodation? After all, people disturb you, trouble you; it's cramped and inconvenient. You like privacy, but that's just what you don't have around you there! And you could live much better, judging by your salary. Fedora says that previously you used to live better by far than now. Surely you haven't lived all your life like this, in solitude, in deprivation, without joy, without a friendly, affable word, renting corners from strangers? Ah, how sorry I feel for you, kind

friend! At least take pity on your health, Makar Alexeyevich! You say your eyes are getting weak, so don't write by candlelight; why do you write? Your zeal for your work is doubtless well-known to your superiors in any case.

Once again I beg you, don't spend so much money on me. I know you love me, but you're not rich yourself... I too was cheerful when I got up today. I felt so happy; Fedora had already been at work for a long time and had got some work for me too. I was so pleased; I just went to buy some silk, then I started work. The whole of the morning my soul felt so light, I was so cheerful! But now it's dark thoughts all the time again, I'm sad; my heart aches through and through.

Ah, what is going to happen to me, what will be my fate? The hard thing is that I am in such uncertainty, that I have no future, that I cannot even foresee what will become of me. And it's frightening looking back. There's such grief everywhere there that my heart is torn in two at the memory alone. I shall forever reproach those wicked people that ruined me!

It's getting dark. Time for work. I should like to write to you of many things, but there's no time, there's a deadline for the work. I need to hurry. Of course letters are a good thing; everything's less dull. But why do you never come and visit us yourself? Why is that, Makar Alexeyevich? After all, it's not far for you now, and you sometimes have some free time set aside. Please come and visit us! I've seen your Tereza. She seems so ill; I felt sorry for her; I gave her twenty copecks. Yes! I almost forgot: be sure to write everything in as much detail as possible about your daily life. What are the people around you like, and do you get on well with them? I very much want to know all of this. Look out now, be sure to write! And today I shall fold the corner back on purpose. Go to bed early; yesterday I saw your light burning until midnight. Well, goodbye. I'm depressed today, and I'm bored and sad! Evidently, it's just one of those days! Goodbye.

Your

Varvara Dobroselova

Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

Yes, sweetheart, yes, my dear, evidently it was one of those days that befell sad old me! Yes, Varvara Alexeyevna, you had a joke at the expense of this old man! Actually it's my fault, it's all my fault! I shouldn't have launched into amours and *doubles entendres* in my old age, with just a wisp of hair left... And another thing, my dear: a man's a funny thing sometimes, a very funny thing. Oh, Saints alive, the things he'll talk about and come out with at times! And what's the result, what follows from it? Nothing at all follows and the result is such rubbish that may the Lord preserve me! I'm not angry, my dear, I'm not, but it's just upsetting to remember everything, upsetting that I wrote to you so ornately and stupidly. And I went off to work today such a cock-of-the-walk; there was such radiance in my heart. For no reason at all there was such festivity in my soul; I felt cheerful! I started work on my papers assiduously – and what was the result of it later on! It was only later on when I looked around that everything became as it was before – grey and gloomy. Still those same ink-stains, still those same desks and papers, and me too still the same; so, as I was, exactly the same I remained – so what reason was there to have been riding around on Pegasus? And where had it all come from? Because the sun had peeped through and the sky had turned azure! Was that why? And what are these fragrances, considering the things that turn up under the windows in our courtyard! Evidently it all seemed that way to me because of my foolishness. But you know, it does sometimes happen that a man can get lost in his own feelings like that and talk nonsense. It occurs for no other reason than the excessive, stupid ardour of the heart. I didn't walk home, but plodded; for no reason at all my head began aching; it was evidently just one thing leading to another. (Maybe I had a draught on my back.) I was delighted at the spring, like a complete idiot, and I went out in my thin greatcoat. And you were wrong about my feelings, my dear! You took their outpouring completely the wrong way. It was fatherly affection that inspired me, pure, fatherly affection alone, Varvara Alexeyevna; for I take the place of your real father, by reason of your bitter orphanhood; I say this from the soul, from the bottom of my heart, as a relative. Because whichever way you look at it, even if I am only a distant relation, maybe, as the saying goes, only a cousin seven

times removed, still I am a relative nonetheless, and now your closest relative and protector; for in the closest place of all where you had the right to look for protection and defence, you found betrayal and injury. And regarding the verse, I'll say to you, my dear, that it's unseemly for me, in my old age, to exercise myself in the composition of poetry. Poetry is poppycock! Even in schools nowadays they thrash the boys for writing verse... that's how it is, my dear.

What's this you write me, Varvara Alexeyevna, about convenience, about peace and about various other things? My dear, I'm not peevish and I'm not demanding, I've never lived better than I do now; so why should I be choosy in my old age? I'm well-fed, clothed and shod, and who are we to start getting big ideas? We're not from a family of counts! My parent's job didn't give him the status of a nobleman, and considering all his family, he had a smaller income than me. I'm no mollycoddle! Actually, if it's a matter of truth, then in my old accommodation everything was far better; it was a bit freer, my dear. Of course, my present accommodation is good as well, even in a certain way more cheerful and, if you like, more varied; I'm not saying anything against it, but still I do feel regret about the old place. We old people, those who aren't as young as they were, that is, get used to our old things as if they were part of the family. The place was just a little one, you know; the walls were... well, what can you say! – the walls were like any other walls, they're not the point, but it's the memories of everything in my past that make me feel depressed... It's a funny thing – it's hard, but it's as if the memories were pleasant. Even what was bad, what I even got upset about at times, in my memories even that is somehow cleansed of the bad part and comes before my imagination in an attractive form. We lived quietly, Varenka; my landlady, the old woman, now deceased, and I. And now I recall even my old woman with a sad feeling! She was a good woman and didn't charge a lot for my lodgings. She was always knitting blankets out of various old scraps on needles a yard long; that's all she ever did. We shared the same light together, so we worked at the one table. She had a granddaughter, Masha – I remember her when she was still a child – she'll be a girl of about thirteen now. She was such a little scamp, cheerful, always making us laugh, and so it was that we lived, the three of us. On a long winter's evening we used to sit down at the round table, drink some tea and

then set about our work. And so that Masha wouldn't get bored and misbehave, the little scamp, the old lady used to start telling tales. And what tales they were! Even a clever, intelligent man would have got carried away listening, let alone a child. Why, I myself sometimes used to light up my pipe and get so carried away that I'd even forget about my work. And the child, our little scamp, would fall into thought; she'd prop up her pink cheek with her little hand, open her pretty little mouth wide, and as soon as there was a frightening story she'd squeeze up tight against the old woman. And it was nice for us to look at her, and you didn't notice the candle burning down, and you didn't hear either the blizzard raging or the snow storm whirling, as they sometimes did, outside. We had a good life, Varenka, and that was the way we lived together for almost twenty years. But why am I rambling on here? Perhaps you don't like such material, and it's not so easy for me to remember it, especially now: it's twilight time. Tereza's busy with something or other, my head's aching, and my back aches a little as well, and my thoughts are so odd, it's as if they were aching too; I feel sad today, Varenka! And what's this you write, my dear? How can I come and visit you? Sweetheart, whatever will people say? After all, I'll have to cross the courtyard, the people here will notice me, they'll start asking questions – rumours will start, gossip will start, the business will be given a different meaning. No, my angel, it'll be better if I see you at the service tomorrow night; that'll be wiser and safer for both of us. Now don't be hard on me, my dear, for writing you a letter like this; now I've read it through I can see that it's all so incoherent. I'm an old man, Varenka, with no education; I didn't get fully educated when I was young, and now, if I should start studying again, my brain wouldn't take anything in. I confess, my dear, I've no talent for description, and I know, without anyone else pointing it out and mocking, that if I want to write anything a little bit more fancy, then I'll come out with a lot of nonsense. I saw you by the window today, saw you lowering the blind. Goodbye, goodbye, may the Lord keep you! Goodbye, Varvara Alexeyevna.

Your disinterested friend

Makar Devushkin

PS: My dear, I'm not writing any satires on anyone now. I've grown too old, my dear, Varvara Alexeyevna, to bare my teeth to no purpose!

And people will start laughing at me on the basis of the Russian proverb: the man, as they say, who sets a trap for someone else... falls into it himself.

9th April

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

Well, you should be ashamed of yourself, my friend and benefactor, Makar Alexeyevich, becoming so sorrowful and capricious. Surely you haven't taken offence! Oh, I can often be incautious, but I didn't expect you to take my words as a cutting joke. Be assured that I shall never dare to laugh at your age or your character. It all happened because of my frivolity, or rather because of my dreadful boredom, and when you're bored, what won't you start doing? I assumed that in your letter you yourself wanted to have a joke. I became dreadfully sad when I saw that you were unhappy with me. No, my dear friend and benefactor, you'll be mistaken if you suspect me of insensitivity and ingratitude. I know in my heart how to appreciate all you've done for me, defending me from wicked people, from their persecution and hatred. I shall always pray to God on your behalf, and if my prayer reaches God and Heaven pays heed to it, then you will be happy.

I feel very unwell today. I'm feverish and shivering by turns. Fedora is very worried about me. There's no reason for you to feel ashamed about visiting us, Makar Alexeyevich. What is it to anyone else? You're acquainted with us, and that's all there is to it!... Goodbye, Makar Alexeyevich. There's nothing more to write about at the moment, and I can't anyway: I'm dreadfully unwell. I beg you once more not to be angry with me and to be confident of the eternal respect and of the attachment

With which I have the honour to be your most devoted

And most humble servant

Varvara Dobroselova

Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

Ah, my dear, what's the matter with you? I mean, you scare me like this every time. I write to you in every letter that you should look after yourself, that you should wrap up warm, that you shouldn't go out when the weather's bad, that you should observe caution in all things – but, my little angel, you don't do as I say. Ah, sweetheart, it's as if you were some child! You're weak, you know, weak as a straw, I know it. Just a little bit of a breeze, and you're sure to be poorly. So you need to be careful, make an effort on your own behalf, avoid dangers and not bring your friends to grief and despondency.

You express a desire, my dear, to learn in detail about my everyday life and about everything that surrounds me. I gladly make haste to fulfil your desire, my dear. I'll begin at the beginning, darling: it'll be more orderly. Firstly, at the front entrance of our building the staircases are perfectly satisfactory; especially the main one – clean, bright, wide, all cast iron and mahogany. But then don't even ask about the backstairs: winding, damp, dirty, with the steps broken and the walls so greasy that your arm sticks if you lean on them. On every landing there are broken chests, chairs and cupboards, rags are hung up everywhere, the windows are knocked out; there are tubs with all sorts of muck, dirt, rubbish, eggshells and fish-sounds; there's a bad smell... in a word, it's unpleasant.

I've already described the layout of the rooms to you; you can't argue, it's convenient, that's true, but they're stuffy somehow, that is, it's not so much that they smell bad, but, if I can put it like this, there's a rather mouldy, pungently sweet sort of smell. The first impression is unfavourable, but that's all right; you only have to be here a couple of minutes, and then it passes, and you don't even notice it passing, because you somehow start to smell bad yourself, and your clothes start to smell, and your hands start to smell, and everything starts to smell – well, and you get used to it. Finches keep on dying here. The midshipman's already buying a fifth – they can't live in our air, that's all there is to it. Our kitchen is large, spacious and bright. True, it's a little smoky in the mornings when people are frying fish or beef, and they do spill things and make it wet everywhere, but on the other hand it's a real paradise in the evening. There's always old linen hanging up on lines in our kitchen, and since

my room isn't far away, that is, it almost adjoins the kitchen, the smell of the linen does trouble me a little; but it's all right: you get used to it after you've lived here awhile.

First thing in the morning, Varenka, the hustle and bustle begins, people getting up, walking around, banging – it's everybody who needs to rising, the people who have jobs or just work for themselves; everybody starts drinking tea. The samovars here belong to the landlady for the most part, there aren't many of them, well, and so we all take turns; and whoever gets in with his teapot out of turn immediately gets his head bitten off. I almost went out of turn the first time, but... well, what's the point of writing about that! It was then that I got to know everyone. The midshipman was the first one I got to know; he's very frank, told me everything: about his father, about his mother, about his sister, who's married to the Tula district assessor, and about the town of Kronstadt. He promised to be my protector in all things and invited me to his room for tea straight away. I found him in the room where they usually play cards here. There they gave me some tea and insisted I should play a game of chance with them. I don't know whether they were laughing at me or not; only they'd played the whole night through themselves, and when I went in they were still playing. There was chalk, and cards, and such smoke floating all around the room that it made my eyes smart. I wouldn't play with them, and I was immediately told off for talking philosophy. After that nobody even spoke to me at all the whole time, but to tell the truth, I was glad of it. I won't visit them now; it's gambling there, just gambling! But the civil servant who has something to do with literature has gatherings in the evenings too. Well, with him everything is nice and modest and innocent and tactful; all on a refined footing.

Well, Varenka, I'll remark to you in passing too that our landlady is a really vile woman, and what's more, a real witch. You've seen Tereza. Well, what is she, when it really comes down to it? As thin as a plucked and sickly chicken. And there are only two servants in the house: Tereza and Faldoni,\* the landlady's manservant. I don't know, perhaps he has some other name as well, but he answers to this one too, and that's what everybody calls him. He's ginger, looks like an Estonian, he's one-eyed, snub-nosed and rude; he's always rowing with Tereza, they almost come to blows. Speaking generally, it's not

entirely nice for me living here. That I should just fall asleep straight away at night and relax – that's something that never happens. There are always sure to be people sitting gambling somewhere, and sometimes things even happen that it's shameful to relate. Now I have at least got used to it a little, but all the same I wonder at how people with families manage, living in such an uproar. An entire family of poor people of some sort rents a room from our landlady, only not alongside the other rooms, but on the other side, in the corner, set apart. Quiet people! Nobody even hears anything of them. They live in one small room divided by a partition. He's some sort of civil servant without a post, dismissed from the service for some reason about seven years ago. His name's Gorshkov; a grey-haired little man; he goes around in such soiled, such worn clothing that it's painful to see; far worse than mine! He's a pitiful, puny thing (we sometimes meet in the corridor); his knees shake, his hands shake, his head shakes, perhaps it's some illness or other, God knows; he's timid, afraid of everyone, slips by to one side; I know I can be shy at times, but he's even worse. His family is a wife and three children. The eldest, a boy, is just like his father, he's a sickly one too. The wife was once not at all bad-looking, you can see that even now; the poor thing goes around in such pitiful rags. I've heard they're in debt to the landlady; she's somehow not that kind with them. I've also heard that Gorshkov himself has problems of some sort, and it was on account of them that he lost his job... there may have been a court case, he may have been on trial, or he may have been under some investigation or something – I can't tell you for sure. But they're ever so, ever so poor – oh Lord God! Their room is always quiet and silent, as if nobody's even living there. You don't even hear the children. And it's simply unheard-of for children not to get a bit frisky and play about once in a while, so that's a bad sign for sure. Once I happened to be passing by their doors in the evening for some reason; at that moment the building had become unusually quiet somehow; I hear a whimpering, then a whispering, then again a whimpering, just as if someone were crying, but so quietly, so pitifully, that my heart was quite torn apart, and afterwards the thought of those poor people never left me the whole night through, so that I didn't even manage to get to sleep properly.

Well, goodbye, my priceless little friend Varenka! I've described everything to you as well as I could. I've been thinking only about you

all day today. My heart's quite despondent about you, my dear. I mean, I know, my poppet, you have no warm coat. Oh, how tired I am of these Petersburg springs, wind and rain with a bit of snow mixed in – it'll be the death of me, Varenka! Such a blessed assortment of the ether that may the Lord preserve me! Don't be hard on my writing, poppet; there's no style, Varenka, no style whatsoever. If only there were some! I write whatever comes into my head, just so as to cheer you up with something. I mean, if I'd had a bit of schooling, it'd be a different matter, but after all, what did I get? Not even a poor boy's schooling.

Your eternal and faithful friend

Makar Devushkin

25th April

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

I met my cousin Sasha today! It's terrible! She'll be ruined too, the poor thing! I also heard talk that Anna Fyodorovna is continually trying to find things out about me. It seems she'll never stop pursuing me. She says she wants *to forgive me*, to forget everything in the past, and that she'll be sure to visit me herself. She says you're not my relative at all, that she's a closer relation, that you have no right whatsoever to enter into our family relationships, and that it's shameful and indecent for me to live on your charity and to be kept by you... She says I've forgotten her hospitality, that she may have saved mother and me from starving to death, that she gave us food and drink and spent money on us for more than two and a half years, that on top of all that she waived our debt. She didn't even want to spare my mother! And if my poor mother knew what they'd done to me! As God is my witness!... Anna Fyodorovna says that in my stupidity I didn't know how to hold on to my good fortune, that she was herself leading me towards that good fortune, that she isn't to blame for any of the rest of it, and that I didn't know how to stand up for my honour myself, or perhaps didn't even want to do so. Who then is to blame for all this, great God! She says that Mr Bykov is absolutely right, and you don't just marry anyone who... oh, what's the point of writing! It's cruel to hear such lies, Makar Alexeyevich! I don't know what's happening to me now. I'm shaking, crying, sobbing; I've been two hours writing you this letter. I thought she would at least admit her blame before me; and then that's the way she is! For God's sake don't be alarmed, my friend, my only well-wisher! Fedora exaggerates everything: I'm not ill. I just caught a bit of a cold yesterday when I went to the Volkovo cemetery for the memorial service for my mother. Why didn't you come with me? I begged you so. Ah, my poor, poor mother, if you rose from the grave, if you only knew, if you could only see what they've done to me!...

V.D.

My sweet Varenka!

I'm sending you a few grapes, poppet; they're good for someone convalescing, they say, and the doctor recommends them for quenching your thirst, so they're just solely for your thirst. You had a fancy for some nice roses the other day, my dear; so here I am now sending you some. Have you any appetite, poppet? That's the main thing. Anyway, thank God that everything's over and done with and that our misfortunes are coming to an end completely too. We shall give thanks to Heaven! But as far as books are concerned, I can't get hold of any anywhere for the time being. They say there is one good book here, and it's written in a very elevated style; they say it's good, I haven't read it myself, but they really praise it here. I asked for it for myself; they've promised to pass it on. But you, will you read it? You're a choosy one in that respect; it's hard to satisfy your taste, I know you, sweetheart. You probably want poetry all the time, lamentations, amours – well, I'll get hold of some poetry too, I'll get hold of the lot; there's a notebook with things copied into it.

I'm doing fine. Don't you worry about me, please, my dear. And the things that Fedora told you about me, that's all nonsense; you tell her that she lied, be sure to tell her, the rumour-monger!... I haven't sold my new uniform at all – and why should I, just think about it, why should I sell it? I mean, they say I'm due forty silver roubles in bonuses, so why on earth should I sell it? Don't you worry, my dear; she's a suspicious one, that Fedora, suspicious. Our life's just beginning, sweetheart! Only you must get better, my angel, for God's sake get better and don't upset an old man. Who is it telling you I've got thin? It's slander, slander again! I'm fighting fit and I've grown so fat that I'm becoming ashamed of myself, I'm well-fed and perfectly content; but if only you would get better! Well, goodbye, my angel; I kiss all your fingers and remain

Your eternal, unchanging friend

Makar Devushkin

PS: Oh my poppet, what ever is this you've started writing again?... What are these mad ideas! How can I possibly visit you so often, my dear, how can I? I ask you. Only by making use of the darkness of

night, and there's hardly any night to speak of these days: it's that time of the year. As it is, my dear, my angel, I hardly left you at all the whole of the time you were ill, while you were delirious; but even then, I'm not at all sure myself how I managed everything, and even so I stopped visiting afterwards; for people had started getting inquisitive and asking a lot of questions. And some sort of gossip has started spreading here anyway. I'm relying on Tereza – she doesn't chatter – but all the same, think about it for yourself, my dear, what will it be like when they find out everything about us? What'll they think and what'll they say then? So you be brave, my dear, and wait until you're better; and then we'll be able to have a rendezvous somewhere out of doors.

1st June

Dearest Makar Alexeyevich!

I so want to do something nice and pleasing for you in return for all your trouble and effort over me, all your love for me, that I finally resolved when I was bored to dig through my chest of drawers and root out my notebook, which I'm now sending you. I began it during the happy period of my life. You've often shown curiosity, asking questions about my former way of life, about my mother, about Pokrovsky, about my stay with Anna Fyodorovna and, finally, about my recent misfortunes, and you were so impatient in your desire to read this notebook, where I took it into my head, God knows why, to record certain moments of my life, that I have no doubt my dispatch will bring you great pleasure. Yet for me it was sad somehow, reading it through again. It seems to me that I've already doubled in age since I wrote the last line of these notes. It was all written at various times. Goodbye, Makar Alexeyevich! I'm dreadfully bored now, and I often suffer from insomnia. It's a very dull convalescence!

V.D.

I was only fourteen years old when my father died. My childhood was the happiest time of my life. It began not here, but far away, in the provinces, in the back of beyond. My father was steward on the huge estate of Prince P. in the province of T. We lived in one of the Prince's villages, and we lived peacefully, quietly, happily... I was such a lively little girl; all I ever used to do was run around the fields, the copses, the garden, and nobody even bothered about me. Father was constantly occupied with his work, mother was busy with her housekeeping; nobody gave me any lessons, and I was glad of it too. I used to run off first thing in the morning either to the pond, or to the copse, or to the haymaking, or to the reapers – and it didn't matter that the sun was burning, that you didn't know yourself where you'd run to from the village, you'd get all scratched on bushes, tear your dress – you'd be scolded at home afterwards, but that was nothing to me.

And I think I would have been happy that way, had I even had to live in the one place and not move out of the village for the whole of my life. Yet even as a child I was forced to leave my native parts. I was still only twelve years old when we moved to St Petersburg. Ah, with what sadness do I recall our sorrowful preparations! How I cried as I bade farewell to everything that was so dear to me. I remember throwing myself onto my father's neck and begging tearfully to stay in the village for just a little longer. My father shouted at me, my mother cried; she said it was necessary, that matters demanded it. Old Prince P. had died. The heirs had dismissed my father from his position. Father had a little money invested in the hands of private individuals in St Petersburg. Hoping to set his circumstances to rights, he considered his personal presence here essential. I learnt all this later on from my mother. We settled here on the Petersburg Side and lived in the same place right up until my father's death.

How difficult it was for me to get used to my new life! We drove into St Petersburg in the autumn. As we were leaving the village, the day was so bright, warm and brilliant; the farm work was drawing to a close; huge stacks of corn already towered up on the threshing floors and raucous flocks of birds crowded around; everything was so clear and cheerful, but here, as we rode into the city, there was rain, a

damp autumnal frost, foul weather, slush and a crowd of new, unfamiliar faces, inhospitable, discontented, angry! We settled in as best we could. I remember everyone bustling around so at our new place, continually busy setting up the new home. Father was always out, and Mother did not have a minute's peace – I was completely forgotten. I felt sad getting up in the morning after the first night in our new home. Our windows looked out onto some yellow fence. There was dirt in the street all the time. Passers-by were rare, and they were all wrapped up so tightly, everyone was so cold.

And at home there was terrible anguish and boredom for days on end. We had almost no relatives or close acquaintances. My father had fallen out with Anna Fyodorovna. (He owed her some money.) People visited us on business quite frequently. They usually argued, made a noise and shouted. After each visit my father became so displeased and angry; he used to pace from corner to corner for hours on end, frowning, and would not say a word to anyone. At those times my mother did not dare even to try to speak to him and remained silent. I would sit down in a corner somewhere with a book, meekly, quietly, sometimes not daring to move.

Three months after our arrival in St Petersburg I was sent to boarding school. How sad I was at first among strangers! Everything was so dry and bleak – the governesses shrieked so, the girls were so mocking, and I was such a savage. Life was strict and exacting. Everything to a timetable, communal meals, boring teachers – it was all a torment, a torture to me at first. I could not even sleep there. I used to cry all through the night, the long, dull, cold night. In the evenings everyone would be revising or learning their lessons; I would be sitting there over dialogues or vocabulary, not daring to move, but actually thinking all the time about the corner that was our home, about my father, my mother, my old nanny and my nanny's fairy tales... ah, how sad I would feel! The most trivial little thing in the house, even that you remember with pleasure. You think and think: how nice it would be at home now! I would be sitting by the samovar in our little room together with the others; it would be so warm, nice and familiar. How I would hug Mother now, you think, ever so close, ever so tight! You think and think, and you start crying quietly in your anguish, quelling the tears in your breast, and the vocabulary won't go into your head. And when you haven't learnt a lesson for the

following day, you dream all night about the teacher, madam, the girls; you try to memorize the lessons all night in your sleep, but the next day you know nothing. They make you kneel, give you only one meal. I was so cheerless and miserable. At first all the girls laughed at me, teased me, put me off when I was saying my lessons, pinched me when we filed in to lunch or tea, complained to a governess about me for no reason whatsoever. But what heaven when my nanny came to fetch me on a Saturday evening! I simply used to hug the dear old lady in a transport of joy. She dressed me, wrapped me up, then could not keep pace with me on the way home as I kept chattering and chattering and telling her things. I arrived home cheerful, joyful, I hugged everyone close as if we had spent ten years apart. Talking, conversations, stories would begin; you would greet everybody, laugh, chuckle, run around, jump about. Serious conversations with my father would begin, about the sciences, about our teachers, about French, about Lhomond's grammar\* – and we were all so cheerful, so content. Even now I feel cheerful remembering those minutes. I tried with all my might to study and please my father. I could see he was giving up the last of everything for me, while God knows how he struggled himself. With every day he was becoming more gloomy, displeased, angry; his character was completely altered for the worse: his affairs were going badly, there were masses of debts. My mother was even afraid to cry at times, was afraid to say a word, in case she made my father angry; she made herself ill; she got thinner and thinner and developed a bad cough. Sometimes I came home from the boarding school – and such sad faces everywhere; Mother crying quietly, Father angry. Reproaches and recriminations would begin. Father would start saying that I brought him no joy, no comfort; that because of me they were going without everything, yet I still couldn't speak French; in short, all the failures, all the misfortunes, everything, everything was vented on me and my mother. And how could he have tormented my poor mother? It was heartbreaking to look at her sometimes; her cheeks were hollow, her eyes sunken, there was this consumptive colour to her face. I came in for it most of all. It always began with trifles, and then God knows how far it would go; often I did not even understand what it was all about. What wasn't I held to account for!... There was French, the fact that I was a complete fool, the fact that the proprietor of our boarding school was a negligent,

stupid woman; the fact that she did not trouble herself about our morality; the fact that my father could still not find himself a position and the fact that Lhomond's grammar was a rotten grammar, and Zapsolsky's\* was much better; the fact that a lot of money had been spent on me for nothing; the fact that I was evidently bereft of feelings, made of stone – in short, there was poor me, struggling with all my might, memorizing dialogues and vocabulary, and I was to blame for everything, I was responsible for it all! And this was not at all because my father did not love me: he thought the world of both me and my mother. That's just how it was, that was his character.

Worries, disappointments, failures tormented my poor father in the extreme: he became distrustful, irritable; often he was close to despair, he began to neglect his health, he caught cold and suddenly fell sick, he suffered for a short time and died so suddenly, so soon, that for several days we were all beside ourselves from the shock. My mother was in a kind of numbed state; I was even afraid for her sanity. No sooner had my father died, than creditors appeared from nowhere, in crowds they surged in. We gave them whatever we had. Our little house on the Petersburg Side, bought by my father six months after our move to St Petersburg, was sold as well. I don't know how everything else was settled, but we ourselves were left without a roof over our heads, without shelter, without sustenance. My mother was suffering from a wasting disease, we were unable to feed ourselves, we had nothing to live on, ahead lay ruin. At that time I had just turned fourteen. And it was then that we were visited by Anna Fyodorovna. She keeps saying she is some sort of landowner, and is somehow related to us. My mother said she was related to us too, only very distantly. She had never visited us while my father was alive. She appeared with tears in her eyes and said she was very concerned for us; she commiserated with us on our loss, on our calamitous situation, and added that my father was himself to blame: that he had lived beyond his means, overstretched himself, and relied too much on his own powers. She expressed her desire to be on closer terms with us, suggested we forget our mutual unpleasantness, and when my mother announced that she had never felt any hostility towards her, she became tearful, took my mother to church, and ordered a requiem service for the sweet man (that was how she referred to my father). After that she came to a solemn reconciliation with my mother.

Following lengthy introductions and forewarnings, Anna Fyodorovna painted in vivid colours our calamitous situation, orphanhood, hopelessness, helplessness, and invited us, as she herself expressed it, to find refuge with her. My mother thanked her, yet could not make up her mind for a long time; but since there was nothing for it, and it was quite impossible to arrange things in any other way, she finally did announce to Anna Fyodorovna that we gratefully accepted her proposition. I remember as if it were now the morning on which we moved from the Petersburg Side to Vasilyevsky Island. The morning was autumnal, bright, dry, frosty. My mother cried; I was dreadfully sad; my breast was bursting, my soul was racked with some inexpressible, terrible anguish... It was a hard time.

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At first, while we, Mother and I, that is, had yet to settle into our new home, living with Anna Fyodorovna was unpleasant somehow and strange for both of us. Anna Fyodorovna lived in her own house on the Sixth Line. In all there were five good rooms in the house. In three of them lived Anna Fyodorovna and my cousin Sasha, a child, an orphan without father or mother, whom she was bringing up. Then we lived in one room, and finally, in the last room, next to us, was a poor student, Pokrovsky, Anna Fyodorovna's lodger. Anna Fyodorovna lived very well, more grandly than might have been supposed, but her fortune was a mystery, just as were her activities. She was always busy, always preoccupied, drove out or went out on foot several times a day, but what she did, with what she was occupied and for what purpose, that I could not guess at all. Her acquaintances were many and varied. Guests were always coming to visit her, and God knows who any of these people were, they always came on business of some sort and just for a minute. My mother always took me off to our room as soon as the bell rang. Anna Fyodorovna used to get dreadfully angry with Mother about this and repeated constantly that we were just too proud, that we were proud beyond our powers, that we had nothing to be proud about, and she did not stop for hours on end. I did not then understand those reproaches about pride; in exactly the same way it is only now that I know, or at least presume to know, why my mother could not make up her mind to live with Anna Fyodorovna. Anna Fyodorovna was a wicked woman; she tormented us constantly. Precisely why she invited us into her home is a mystery for me to this day. At first she was quite affectionate with us, but later on she really did reveal her true character in full, when she saw that we were completely helpless and had nowhere to go. Subsequently she became extremely affectionate with me, even somehow crudely so, to the point of flattery, but at first I too suffered along with my mother. She reproached us at every moment; she did nothing but talk about her benefaction. She introduced us to strangers as her poor relations, a helpless little widow and orphan, to whom out of charity, for the sake of Christian love, she had given refuge in her home. At the table her eyes followed every mouthful we took, but if we did not eat, the old story would begin again: we were disdainful, she would say, "Don't be

hard on me, all I have is yours"; would that we'd had something better ourselves. She criticized my father continually; she said he had wanted to be better than other people, but it had turned out badly; that he had made his wife and daughter beggars, and if a beneficent relative had not turned up, a compassionate Christian soul, then God knows, we might have been forced to starve to death in the middle of the street. The things she said! It was not so much bitter as repugnant to listen to her. My mother cried continually; her health became worse from day to day, she was visibly failing, yet at the same time we worked from dawn till dusk, sewing to order, which did not please Anna Fyodorovna at all; she repeated continually that she did not keep a fashion house in her home. But we needed clothes, we needed to put something aside for unforeseen expenses, we needed to have our own money without fail. We saved up just in case, hoping that with time we would be able to move somewhere else. But my mother lost the last of her strength working: she grew weaker with every day. Sickness, like a worm, was visibly eating away at her life and bringing her closer to the grave. I saw it all, felt it all, suffered it all; it was all before my eyes!

One day followed another, and each day resembled the one before. We lived quietly, as if we were not in the city at all. Anna Fyodorovna quietened down little by little as she herself became fully conscious of her dominion. But in fact, nobody ever thought of contradicting her. We in our room were separated from her quarters by a corridor, and alongside us, as I have already mentioned, lived Pokrovsky. He taught Sasha French and German, History, Geography – all the sciences, as Anna Fyodorovna said, and in return received board and lodging from her. Sasha was a very bright girl, albeit playful and mischievous; she was then about thirteen. Anna Fyodorovna remarked to my mother that it would be no bad thing if I were to start studying too, since I had not finished the course at the boarding school. My mother consented gladly, and for a whole year I was taught, together with Sasha, by Pokrovsky.

Pokrovsky was a poor, a very poor young man; his health did not permit him to go and study full-time, and it was only out of habit that we called him a student. He lived modestly, meekly and quietly, so you could not even hear him from our room. He was so strange in appearance; he walked so clumsily, bowed so clumsily, spoke so

oddly, that at first I could not even look at him without laughing. Sasha played him up continually, especially when he was giving us lessons. And in addition he was by nature irritable, he was constantly getting angry, he would be beside himself over every little thing, he shouted at us, complained about us and would frequently go off in a temper to his room without finishing a lesson. And he used to sit there for days on end over his books. He had a lot of them, and they were all such expensive, rare books. He taught somewhere else as well and received some sort of payment, so that no sooner did he get some money than he would immediately go and buy himself some books.

With time I got to know him better, more intimately. He was the kindest, the worthiest man, the best of all I have had the good fortune to meet. My mother had great respect for him. Later on he was the best of friends to me too – after my mother, of course.

At first, although such a big girl, I joined with Sasha in her mischief, and we used to spend hours racking our brains over how we could tease him and make him lose his patience. He was dreadfully funny when he was angry and we found this extremely amusing. (I feel ashamed even to remember it.) Once we teased him about something almost to the point of tears, and I clearly heard him whisper: “Wicked children.” I was suddenly embarrassed; I felt ashamed, and bitter, and sorry for him. I remember that I blushed to the roots of my hair, and all but had tears in my eyes as I started begging him not to be upset, and not to be offended by our silly mischief, but he closed his book, did not finish our lesson, and went off to his room. I was bursting with remorse the whole day. The idea that we children had reduced him to tears with our cruelty was unbearable for me. We must have been expecting his tears. Therefore we must have wanted them; we must have succeeded in exhausting the last of his patience; we must have forced him, the poor, unfortunate man, to recall his cruel destiny! I lay awake all that night in vexation, sorrow and remorse. They say that remorse eases the soul – on the contrary. I do not know how, but vanity too came to be mixed in with my grief. I did not want him to think me a child. I was then already fifteen.

From that day on I began tormenting my imagination, creating thousands of plans for a way I could suddenly make Pokrovsky change his opinion of me. But there were times when I was timid and shy; in

my position then I could not decide upon anything, and restricted myself to dreams alone (and God knows what dreams!). I merely stopped joining Sasha in her mischief; he stopped getting angry with us; but that was not enough for my vanity.

Now I shall say a few words about the strangest, most curious and most pitiful man of any that I have ever happened to meet. I mention him now, precisely at this point in my notes, because right up until this period I had paid him almost no attention – then everything concerning Pokrovsky suddenly became of interest to me!

A little old man would sometimes appear in our house, dirty, badly dressed, small, grey-haired, awkward, clumsy, in short, as strange as could be. From your first look at him you might have thought he was somehow ashamed of something, somehow shamefaced about himself. For that reason he was always sort of hunched up, sort of contorted, and he writhed and grimaced so, you might have concluded, almost without error, that he wasn't in his right mind. He sometimes used to come and stand in our porch by the glass doors, not daring to enter the house. As soon as anyone went past – Sasha or I, or one of the servants that he knew to be more kindly towards him – he would immediately wave, beckon to the person, make various signs, and only when you nodded and called to him – the prearranged sign that there were no strangers in the house and that he could come in whenever he liked – only then would the old man quietly open the door, smile joyfully, rubbing his hands in pleasure, and walking on tiptoe, make straight for Pokrovsky's room. This was his father.

Later I learnt this poor old man's story in detail. At one time he had been a civil servant somewhere, possessed not the slightest ability, and occupied the very last, the most insignificant position at work. When his first wife died (the mother of Pokrovsky the student) he took it into his head to remarry, and he got married to a common sort. With the new wife in the house, everything was turned upside down; she let nobody have a life of their own; she had everyone under her thumb. Pokrovsky the student was then still a child of about ten. His stepmother hated him. But Fate smiled on the little Pokrovsky. Bykov, a landowner who knew Pokrovsky the civil servant and had once been his benefactor, took the child under his patronage and placed him in a school of some sort. And he took an interest in him because he had known his late mother, who, while still a girl, had had Anna

Fyodorovna as a benefactress and had been given by her in marriage to Pokrovsky the civil servant. Mr Bykov, a friend and close acquaintance of Anna Fyodorovna, moved by generosity, had given the bride a dowry of five thousand roubles. Where this money had gone was unknown. That was the way Anna Fyodorovna told me all this; because Pokrovsky the student never liked talking about his family circumstances. His mother was said to have been very good-looking, and it seems strange to me that she made such a poor marriage with such an insignificant man... She died while still young, some four years after her marriage.

After school the young Pokrovsky went to some high school and then to the university. Mr Bykov, who came to St Petersburg very frequently, did not end his patronage here either. Because of his ill-health Pokrovsky was unable to continue his studies at the university. Mr Bykov introduced him to Anna Fyodorovna with his own recommendation, and in this way the young Pokrovsky was taken in, on condition that he teach Sasha anything that might be demanded.

Meanwhile the old man Pokrovsky, drowning his sorrows over his wife's cruelty, had succumbed to the worst of vices and was almost always in a drunken state. His wife used to beat him, exiled him to the kitchen, and reduced him to such a state that he finally grew accustomed to blows and ill-treatment and did not complain. He was still a man of no great age, but as a result of his bad habits he had all but lost possession of his faculties. So the only sign of noble human feelings in him was his unlimited love for his son. The young Pokrovsky was said to be the spitting image of his late mother. Was it not memories of his former kind wife that prompted such boundless love for him in the heart of the broken old man? The old man could not even talk of anything other than his son, and always visited him twice a week. He did not dare come more often because the young Pokrovsky could not bear his father's visits. Of all his faults, the first and most important was indisputably his disrespect for his father. Yet the old man was at times the most unbearable being in the world. Firstly, he was dreadfully curious, secondly, with his conversations and questions, which were the most pointless and senseless, he was continually preventing his son from working, and finally, he would sometimes appear in a drunken state. The son gradually broke the old man of his vices, of his curiosity and his continual chattering, and

finally had his father obeying him in all things, as though he were an oracle, and not daring to open his mouth without permission.

The poor old man could not shower too much admiration and joy on his Petyenka, as he called his son. When he came to see him he almost always had a certain anxious and meek air, probably because of his uncertainty as to how his son would receive him, he generally spent a long time plucking up the courage to go in, and if I happened to be there, he used to spend twenty minutes or so questioning me – how was Petyenka, was he well, exactly what mood was he in, and was he busy with any important work? What exactly was he doing? Was he writing or busy thinking about something? When I had encouraged and reassured him sufficiently, the old man finally plucked up the courage to enter, and opened the door ever so quietly and ever so cautiously, at first poked just his head in, and if he saw that his son was not angry and gave him a nod, he went quietly into the room, taking off his greatcoat and his hat, which was constantly crumpled, full of holes and with a tattered brim, and hung everything up on a hook, did everything quietly, inaudibly; then he sat down cautiously on a chair somewhere and did not take his eyes off his son, tried to catch his every movement, wanting to guess his Petyenka's mood. If his son was a little out of sorts and the old man noticed it, he immediately rose from his seat and explained that "you know, Petyenka, I just popped in, just for a minute. I've been a long way, you see, and I was passing by, and I dropped in for a rest." And then without a word, he submissively took his greatcoat and hat and quietly opened the door again and left, forcing himself to smile, so as to contain the grief boiling up in his soul and not reveal it to his son.

But when the son received his father well, the old man was beside himself with joy. His pleasure showed in his face, in his gestures, in his movements. If his son began a conversation with him, he always raised himself a little from his seat and replied quietly, obsequiously, almost with awe, and always tried to use the most select, that is, the most amusing expressions. But he didn't have the gift of the gab; he always got confused and shy, so that he didn't know what to do with his hands, what to do with himself, and afterwards he kept on whispering his reply to himself for a long time, as though wishing to correct himself. But if he succeeded in giving a good reply, the old man preened himself, straightened his waistcoat, tie and tailcoat and

adopted an air of dignity. And sometimes he would be cheered and his courage built up to such an extent that he would quietly get up from his chair, go up to the bookshelf, take down some book or other and even read through something then and there, no matter what the book. All this he did with a look of feigned indifference and composure, as if he could do as he liked with his son's books at any time, as if his son's kindness were nothing new to him at all. But once I happened to see how the poor thing took fright when Pokrovsky asked him not to touch the books. He became confused, in his haste he put the book back upside down, then in trying to set things right he turned the spine to the rear, smiled, blushed and did not know how to make amends for his crime. With his advice, Pokrovsky was gradually breaking his father of his bad habits, and as soon as he had seen him in a sober state two or three times running, the next time he visited he gave him in parting twenty-five or fifty copecks or more. Sometimes he bought him a pair of boots, a tie or a waistcoat. And then the old man was as proud as a peacock in his new things. Sometimes he would drop in on us. He brought Sasha and me gingerbread cockerels and apples, and spent the whole time talking to us about Petyenka. He asked us to study attentively, to be good, told us that Petyenka was a kind son, an exemplary son and, moreover, a learned son. Then he winked at us so funnily with his left eye, contorted himself so amusingly, that we couldn't stop ourselves from laughing and had a really good chuckle at him. My mother was very fond of him. But the old man hated Anna Fyodorovna, although in front of her he was as quiet as a mouse.

I soon stopped studying with Pokrovsky. He continued to regard me as a child, a playful little girl on the same level as Sasha. This was very hurtful for me, because I tried with all my might to make amends for my earlier behaviour. But I went unnoticed. This irritated me more and more. I hardly ever spoke to Pokrovsky outside of lessons, indeed I was unable to speak. I would blush, become confused, and then cry in a corner somewhere in annoyance.

I don't know how it would have all ended, had a certain strange circumstance not helped to bring us together. One evening when my mother was sitting with Anna Fyodorovna, I went quietly into Pokrovsky's room. I knew he was out, and don't really know why I took it into my head to go in there. Until then I had never even

glanced into his room, although we had already lived next to one another for over a year. On this occasion my heart was beating so hard, so hard, that it seemed to want to leap out of my breast. I looked all around with a particular curiosity. Pokrovsky's room was extremely poorly appointed; there was very little order. Five long bookshelves were nailed to the walls. Papers lay on the table and on the chairs. Books and papers! A strange idea came to me, and at the same time a certain unpleasant feeling of vexation took hold of me. It seemed to me that my friendship, my loving heart was not enough for him. He was educated, while I was stupid and knew nothing, had read nothing, not a single book... At this point I looked enviously at the long shelves, sagging under the weight of books. I was seized by vexation, anguish, a kind of fury. I suddenly wanted to read his books, and I there and then resolved to do so, to the very last one, and as quickly as possible. I don't know, perhaps I thought that by learning everything that he knew I would be more worthy of his friendship. I rushed to the first shelf; without thinking, without pausing, I seized the first dusty old volume that came to hand, and, turning red, then white, trembling in agitation and fear, I carried the stolen book off to my room, bent on reading it in the night, by the night light, after my mother had fallen asleep.

But how vexed I was when, on reaching our room, I hurried to open the book and saw some old, half-rotten Latin text, all eaten away by worms. I lost no time in going back. No sooner did I come to put the book on the shelf, than I heard a noise in the corridor and somebody's footsteps close by. I started to hurry and make haste, but the infuriating book had been so tightly packed in, that when I had taken out the one, all the others had expanded of their own accord and closed ranks in such a way that now there was no more room left for their former comrade. I didn't have the strength to squeeze the book in. However, I pushed the books as hard as I possibly could. The rusty nail on which the shelf was held, and which seemed to have been deliberately waiting for this moment to break, broke. One end of the shelf flew downwards. The books scattered onto the floor with a crash. The door opened and Pokrovsky entered the room.

It should be noted that he could not bear it when anybody took liberties in his domain. Woe betide anyone who touched his books! You can judge, then, my horror, when the books, large and small, in

all possible formats, all possible sizes and thicknesses, plunged from the shelf, went flying, bounced under the table, under the chairs, all around the room. I might have tried to flee, but it was too late. "It's over, I thought, it's over! I'm lost, done for! I play up and mess about like a ten-year-old child; I'm a stupid little girl! I'm a complete idiot!!" Pokrovsky was dreadfully angry. "Well, that was all I needed!" he shouted. "Well, aren't you ashamed of such bad behaviour!... Will you ever leave off?" And he rushed to pick the books up himself. I tried to bend down and help him. "Don't bother, don't bother!" he shouted. "You'd do better not to go places you haven't been asked." However, somewhat mollified by my submissive movement, he now continued more quietly, in his recent edifying tone, exploiting his recent rights as a teacher: "Well, when are you going to grow up and get some sense? After all, just look at yourself, you're no longer a child, you know, you're not a little girl, you're already fifteen, after all!" And at this point, probably wanting to check if it was true that I was no longer little, he glanced at me and blushed to the roots of his hair. I did not understand; I stood before him and looked at him with my eyes wide open in amazement. He rose, came up to me with an air of embarrassment, got dreadfully confused, started to say something, seemed to be apologizing for something, perhaps for having only now noticed that I was such a big girl. Finally I understood. I don't remember what came over me then; I became confused, flustered, I blushed even deeper than Pokrovsky, covered my face with my hands and ran out of the room.

I didn't know what else I could do, where to go in my shame. The single fact that he had caught me in his room! I couldn't look at him for three whole days. I would blush to the point of tears. The strangest ideas, funny ideas went round inside my head. One of them, the wildest, was that I wanted to go to him, talk openly with him, confess everything to him, tell him everything candidly and assure him that I had acted not like a silly little girl, but with good intentions. And I was almost completely resolved upon going, but, thank God, I did not have the courage. I can imagine what harm I would have done! Even now I feel ashamed recalling it all.

A few days later, all of a sudden, my mother fell dangerously ill. She did not get out of bed for two days, and then on the third night she was feverish and delirious. I had already stayed awake one night,

caring for my mother, sitting at her bedside, bringing her drinks and giving her medicines at certain times. The next night I was completely worn out. I nodded off at times, there was a green mist in my eyes, my head was spinning, and I was ready to drop from exhaustion at any minute, but my mother's weak moans roused me, I started, woke up for a moment, and then drowsiness got the better of me again. I was in torment. I do not know, I cannot remember, but some terrible dream, some dreadful vision came into my disturbed mind in that agonizing minute of struggle between sleep and wakefulness. I awoke in horror. The room was dark, the night light was going out, strips of light would suddenly flood the whole room, then flicker a little across the wall, then disappear entirely. For some reason I became frightened, a sort of horror came upon me; my imagination was stirred by the dreadful dream; anguish constricted my heart... I jumped up from the chair and some excruciating, terribly painful feeling made me let out an involuntary shriek. At that moment the door opened and Pokrovsky entered our room.

I remember only that I came round in his arms. He sat me down carefully in an armchair, handed me a glass of water and bombarded me with questions. I do not remember what answers I gave. "You're ill, you're very ill yourself," he said, taking me by the hand, "you're in a fever, you're killing yourself, you're not sparing your own health; calm yourself, lie down and go to sleep. I'll wake you up in two hours, calm yourself a little... Lie down now, lie down!" he continued, not allowing me to utter a single word in objection. Tiredness had taken away the last of my strength; my eyes were closing in weakness. I lay back in the armchair, meaning to fall asleep only for half an hour, and slept right through until morning. Pokrovsky woke me up only when the time came to give my mother her medicine.

The next evening at about eleven o'clock, when, after resting a little in the afternoon, I had made ready to sit in the armchair by my mother's bed once more, with the firm resolve on this occasion not to fall asleep, Pokrovsky knocked at our room. I opened the door. "It's boring for you sitting by yourself," he said to me, "here's a book for you; take it; it won't all be so boring." I took it; I don't remember what book it was; I probably didn't dip into it then, although I was awake all night. A strange inner agitation would not let me sleep; I could not keep still; several times I got up from the armchair and

began walking around the room. Some inner contentment was flooding through the whole of my being. I was so glad of Pokrovsky's attention. I was proud of his anxiety and concern over me. I thought and dreamt the whole night through. Pokrovsky did not drop in again, and I knew he would not come, and I looked forward to the next evening.

The following evening, when everyone in the house had already settled down, Pokrovsky opened his door and began talking to me, standing by the threshold of his room. I do not remember now a single word of what we then said to one another; I only remember that I was shy, confused, that I felt vexed with myself and was impatient for the conversation to end, although I had myself desired it with all my might, had been dreaming about and composing my questions and answers all day long... From that evening there began the first strand of our friendship. Throughout the course of my mother's illness we spent several hours together every night. Little by little I overcame my diffidence, although after each of our conversations there was still something about which I could feel vexed with myself. Yet with secret joy and proud pleasure I saw that because of me he was forgetting his infuriating books. By chance, jokingly, the conversation turned once to their falling from the shelf. That minute was strange, and I was somehow too frank and candid; ardour and a strange rapture carried me away, and I confessed everything to him... the fact that I wanted to study, to know something, that I was vexed about being considered a little girl, a child... I repeat that I was in a very strange mood; my heart was tender, there were tears in my eyes, I concealed nothing and told him everything, everything – about my friendship for him, about my desire to love him, to be at one with him in the life of the heart, to comfort him, to soothe him. He looked at me strangely somehow, in embarrassment, in astonishment, and did not say a word to me. I suddenly felt dreadfully hurt, sad. It seemed to me that he did not understand me, that he was possibly laughing at me. I suddenly began to cry like a child, burst out sobbing, could not contain myself; it was as though I were having some sort of fit. He seized my hands, kissed them, pressed them to his chest, tried to talk me round, to comfort me; he was deeply touched; I do not remember what he said to me, but only that I cried, and laughed, and cried again, blushed, and could not utter a word in my joy. Yet despite my agitation I noticed that

there nevertheless remained in Pokrovsky a certain embarrassment and constraint. He seemed unable to contain his wonder at my enthusiasm, my rapture, such sudden, ardent, fervent friendship. Perhaps at first he was just curious; subsequently his indecision vanished, and with simple, direct emotion, the same as my own, he accepted my attachment to him, my affable words, my attention, and replied to it all with the same attention, equally amicably and affably, as my sincere friend, as my own brother. My heart felt so warm, so well!... I did not hide or conceal anything; he saw all this, and with every day became more and more attached to me.

And I truly do not remember, was there anything he and I did not talk about in those agonizing and at the same time sweet hours of our meetings, at night, in the flickering light of the icon lamp, and almost at the very bedside of my poor sick mother?... We talked about anything that came into our heads, that was torn from our hearts, that begged to be said – and we were almost happy... Oh, that was both a sad and a joyful time – all mixed together – and I feel both sad and joyful remembering it now. Memories, whether joyful or bitter, are always a torment – for me, at least – but even that torment is a delight. And when your heart begins to feel heavy, painful, weary, sad, then memories refresh and enliven it, as the dewdrops on a moist evening at the end of a hot day refresh and enliven a poor, sorry flower that has been burnt in the day's heat.

My mother was getting better, but I still continued to sit by her bed during the nights. Pokrovsky often gave me books; I read, at first so as not to fall asleep, then more attentively, then avidly; there suddenly opened up before me much that was new, previously unknown, unfamiliar to me. An abundant stream of new ideas, new impressions surged all at once towards my heart. And the greater the agitation, the greater the confusion and effort it cost me to accept the new impressions, the dearer they were to me, the more delightfully they rocked my entire soul. All at once, suddenly, they crowded into my heart, without allowing it any rest. A strange sort of chaos began to disturb the whole of my being. But this spiritual turbulence did not have the capacity or the power to upset me completely. I was too dreamy, and that saved me.

When my mother's illness was over, our meetings in the evenings and our long conversations ceased; we sometimes managed to

exchange a few words, often empty and insignificant, but it was a pleasure for me to give everything a significance of my own, my own particular implicit value. My life was full, I was happy, calmly, quietly happy. Thus passed several weeks...

One day old Pokrovsky called on us for some reason. He chatted to us for a long time, he was unusually cheerful, bright, talkative; he laughed, joked in his own way, and finally provided the solution to the riddle of his delight, announcing to us that in exactly one week it would be Petyenka's birthday, and that to mark the occasion he would be sure to pay his son a visit; that he would put on his new waistcoat, and that his wife had promised to buy him a pair of new boots. In short, the old man was entirely happy, and chatted about anything that entered his head.

His birthday! That birthday gave me no peace either by day or by night. I was absolutely determined to remind Pokrovsky of my friendship and give him something as a gift. But what? Finally I came up with the idea of giving him books. I knew that he wanted to have the complete works of Pushkin in the latest edition,\* and I decided to buy Pushkin for him. I had about thirty roubles of my own, earned by needlework. I had this money set aside for a new dress. I immediately sent our cook, old Matryona, to find out how much the complete Pushkin cost. Disaster! The price of all eleven books, adding in the cost of bindings, was at least some sixty roubles. Where could I find the money? I thought and thought, and did not know what decision to take. I did not want to ask my mother. Of course my mother would have certainly helped me, but then everyone in the house would have found out about our present, and in addition, the present would have turned into gratitude, payment for a whole year of Pokrovsky's labours. I wanted to give him a gift by myself, so that nobody else would know. While for his labours with me I wanted to be eternally indebted to him, without any kind of repayment apart from my friendship. Finally I came up with an idea of how to get out of the predicament.

I knew that it was sometimes possible to buy a little-used, almost brand-new book from the second-hand booksellers in Gostiny Dvor\* at half-price, if only you haggled. I resolved to make for the arcade without fail. And so it came about; the very next day both we and Anna Fyodorovna turned out to need something. My mother was

unwell, Anna Fyodorovna was feeling very conveniently lazy, so that I had to be entrusted with all the errands, and I set off together with Matryona.

To my delight, I found the Pushkin extremely quickly, and in an extremely attractive binding. I began haggling. At first I was asked for more than it cost in the shops, but then, albeit not without some difficulty, and after walking away several times, I got the merchant to the point where he had reduced the price and limited his demands to just ten silver roubles. What fun I had haggling!... Poor Matryona could not understand what was the matter with me and why I had taken it into my head to buy so many books. But it was dreadful! My entire capital consisted of thirty paper roubles, and the merchant simply would not agree to reduce the price. Finally I started imploring, I begged and begged and finally prevailed. He reduced the price, but only by two and a half roubles, and he swore that he was making even this reduction only for my sake, I was such a nice young lady, and nothing would have made him do so for anybody else. Two and a half roubles short! I was ready to burst into tears in vexation. But the most unexpected circumstance helped me in my misfortune.

Not far away, at another bookstall, I caught sight of old Pokrovsky. Crowding around him were four or five second-hand booksellers; they had him at his wit's end, they had muddled him completely. Each of them was offering him his wares, and the things they offered him, the things he wanted to buy! The poor old man stood in their midst, like some browbeaten creature, and did not know what he should take of what was on offer. I went up to him and asked what he was doing there. The old man was very glad to see me; he loved me madly, perhaps no less than he did Petyenka. "I'm here buying books, Varvara Alexeyevna," he answered me, "buying books for Petyenka. It'll be his birthday soon, and he likes books, so here I am buying them for him..." The old man always expressed himself in a funny way, and now, on top of everything, he was in the most dreadful confusion. No matter what he asked the price of, everything was one silver rouble, two, three silver roubles; he did not even ask the prices of the big books, but just looked at them enviously from time to time, fingered the pages, turned them in his hands and put them back in their places again. "No, no, that's too dear," he said in a low voice, "perhaps just something from over here," and he then began sorting through some

slim little paperbacks, songbooks and almanacs; these were all very cheap. "But why are you buying all this," I asked him, "this is all dreadful rubbish." – "Ah no," he replied, "no, you just have a look at what good books there are here; there are some very, very good books!" And he drawled out these last words so piteously, it seemed to me that he was ready to burst into tears in vexation over why it was that good books were dear, and that at any moment a teardrop would drip from his pale cheeks onto his red nose. I asked whether he had much money. "Well look," and here the poor thing pulled out all his money, wrapped up in a grimy sheet of newspaper, "here's a fifty-copeck piece, a twenty-copeck piece, and about twenty copecks in copper." Straight away I dragged him off to my bookseller. "No fewer than eleven books here cost just thirty-two roubles fifty copecks; I have thirty; add two roubles fifty copecks, and we'll buy all these books and give him a present jointly." The old man went mad with joy, spilt out all his money, and the bookseller loaded him up with the whole of our joint library. My little old man stuffed all his pockets with books, gathered them up in both hands, under his arms, and carried everything off home, giving me his word that the next day he would quietly bring all the books to me.

The next day the old man came to see his son, sat with him for an hour or so as usual, then dropped in on us and sat down beside me with the most comical air of secrecy. With a smile at first, rubbing his hands in proud pleasure at having some secret, he announced to me that the books had all been transferred to our house quite unnoticed and were standing in a corner of the kitchen under Matryona's protection. Then the conversation naturally moved on to the awaited celebration; then the old man became expansive on how we would present the gift, and the deeper he went into his subject and the more he spoke about it, the more noticeable it became to me that he had something on his mind about which he was unable, did not dare, was even afraid to express himself. I continued to wait in silence. The secret joy, the secret pleasure that I had easily read hitherto in his strange behaviour, his grimaces and his winking left eye, vanished. He was becoming ever more worried and anxious by the minute; finally he could not contain himself.

"Listen," he began shyly, in a low voice, "listen, Varvara Alexeyevna... do you know what, Varvara Alexeyevna?..." The old

man was dreadfully embarrassed. “You see: when his birthday arrives, you take ten books and give them to him yourself – from you, that is, on your part – and then I’ll take one, the eleventh, and I’ll give him a present from myself as well, personally, that is, on my part. So that, you see, you’ll have something to give him and I’ll have something to give him; we’ll both have something to give him.” At this point the old man got confused and fell silent. I glanced at him; in shy expectation he was awaiting my sentence. “But why is it you don’t want us to give them to him together, Zakhar Petrovich?” – “Well, Varvara Alexeyevna, it’s just that, the thing is... you know, I, it’s, well...” – in a word, the old man became embarrassed, turned red, got stuck in his sentence and could not get moving.

“You see, Varvara Alexeyevna,” he finally managed to explain, “I play up at times... That is, I want to inform you that I’m almost always playing up, and play up all the time... I adhere to something that’s bad... That is, it can get so cold out, you know, and sometimes various unpleasant things occur as well, or you get to feel sad somehow, or something bad happens, and so at times I can’t control myself and start playing up, and I sometimes have too much to drink. Petrusha doesn’t like that at all. Then, you see, Varvara Alexeyevna, he gets cross, scolds me and lectures me on various morals. So that now I’d like to prove to him myself with my present that I’m changing for the better and beginning to behave myself properly; that I’ve saved up to buy him a book, saved up for a long time, because I hardly ever have any money at all, unless, as sometimes happens, Petrusha gives me some. He knows that. Consequently, he’ll see the use of my money and learn that I’m doing all this just for him.”

I felt dreadfully sorry for the old man. I did not think it over for long. The old man watched me anxiously. “Well, listen, Zakhar Petrovich,” I said, “you give him all of them!” – “What do you mean, all? That is, all the books?...” – “Why yes, all the books.” – “And from myself?” – “From yourself.” – “Just from myself? That is, in my name?” – “Why yes, in your name...” I seemed to be explaining it very clearly, but it was a very long time before the old man understood.

“Why yes,” he said pensively, “yes! That’ll be very good, that’d be extremely good, only what about you, Varvara Alexeyevna?” – “Well, I won’t give him anything.” – “What do you mean?” cried the old man, almost in fright, “so you won’t give Petyenka anything, so you

don't want to give him anything?" The old man took fright; at that moment he seemed ready to give up his proposition so that I too could give his son some sort of gift. He was a kind old man! I assured him that I would be happy to give some sort of present, only I didn't want to deprive him of the pleasure. "If your son is pleased," I added, "and you're happy, then I'll be happy too, because in secret, in my heart, I shall feel as if I'd actually given him a present." The old man was completely reassured by this. He spent another two hours with us, but all that time he could not sit still, he kept getting up, fussing about, making a noise, fooling around with Sasha, giving me surreptitious kisses, pinching my arms and pulling faces at Anna Fyodorovna on the sly. Anna Fyodorovna finally sent him packing from the house. In short, the old man let himself go in his delight to a degree that he had perhaps never done before.

He appeared on the great day at eleven o'clock precisely, straight from matins, in his tailcoat, respectably darned, and, indeed, wearing a new waistcoat and new boots. In each hand he held a bundle of books. We were then all sitting in Anna Fyodorovna's reception hall, drinking coffee (it was a Sunday). I think the old man began by saying that Pushkin was an extremely good poet; then, getting mixed up and confused, he moved on suddenly to say that one ought to behave well, and that if a man does not behave well, then that means he is playing up; that bad tendencies ruin and destroy a man; he even enumerated several ruinous examples of intemperance, and concluded by saying that for some time now he had been completely changed for the better and that his behaviour was now exemplary. That he had sensed the justice of his son's admonitions before, that he had sensed it all long ago and stored it all up in his heart, but now he had actually begun to control himself. In proof of which he was presenting some books bought with money he had been saving up over a long period of time.

I could not contain my tears and laughter while listening to the poor old man; he knew how to lie, did he not, when the need arose! The books were taken into Pokrovsky's room and put on a shelf. Pokrovsky guessed the truth at once. The old man was invited to lunch. That day we were all so cheerful. After lunch we played forfeits and cards; Sasha was playful and I did not lag behind. Pokrovsky was attentive to me and kept seeking an opportunity to have a talk with me in private, but I avoided it. That was the best day in four whole

years of my life.

But now only sad and burdensome memories are to come; the story of my black days is to begin. Perhaps that is why my pen starts to move more slowly and seems to refuse to write any more. Perhaps that is why such enthusiasm and such love were there while I was going over in my memory the least details of my simple little life in the days when I was happy. Those days were so brief; they were replaced by grief, black grief, that will end God alone knows when.

My misfortunes began with the illness and death of Pokrovsky.

He fell sick two months after the last events that I described here. In those two months he was tireless in his efforts to find ways to make a living, for up until then he still had no proper position. Like all consumptives, he did not part with his hope for a very long life until his last moment. He had the chance of a place as a teacher somewhere, but that profession was repugnant to him. He could not serve anywhere in a government post because of ill-health. Moreover he would have had to wait a long time for the first instalment of his salary. In short, Pokrovsky saw nothing but failures everywhere; his character was getting worse. His health was deteriorating; he did not notice it. Autumn came on. Every day he went out in his light greatcoat to try and sort out his affairs, to plead and beg for a position somewhere – which tormented him inwardly; he got his feet wet, he got soaked in the rain, and finally he took to his bed, from which he rose no more... He died in the depths of autumn, at the end of October.

I hardly left his room throughout his illness, I looked after him and waited on him. I was often awake for night after night. He was rarely conscious; he was often delirious; he spoke about God knows what: about his position, about his books, about me, about his father... and it was then that I heard much about his circumstances that I had not known before and about which I had not even guessed. In the early days of his illness everyone in the house looked at me strangely somehow; Anna Fyodorovna shook her head. But I looked everybody straight in the eye, and nobody thought of condemning me any more for my concern for Pokrovsky – not my mother, anyway.

Sometimes Pokrovsky recognized me, but that was rare. He was unconscious almost all the time. Sometimes he would be talking to somebody for ages and ages for nights on end in obscure, dark words,

and his hoarse voice reverberated in his cramped room as if in a coffin; then I would feel afraid. On the last night in particular he was like a man in a frenzy; his suffering and anguish were awful; his groans tortured my soul. The whole house was in a sort of fright. Anna Fyodorovna kept praying for God to take him quickly. A doctor was called. The doctor said that the patient was sure to die before morning.

Old Pokrovsky spent the entire night in the corridor, right by the door to his son's room; some sort of bast matting was laid down for him there. He came into the room continually; he was dreadful to look at. He was so racked with grief that he seemed completely devoid of feeling and sense. His head shook in terror. The whole of his body was trembling and he kept whispering something to himself, discussing something with himself. I thought he would go mad with grief.

Just before dawn, tired out by his spiritual pain, the old man fell asleep on his matting like a dead man. By eight o'clock his son was in the throes of death; I woke the father up. Pokrovsky was fully conscious and said goodbye to each of us. It was odd! I was unable to cry; yet my soul was being torn apart.

But I was tormented and tortured most of all by his last moments. For ever such a long time he kept on asking for something with his stiffening tongue, yet I could make nothing of his words. My heart was breaking from the pain! He was troubled for a whole hour, longing for something all the while, struggling to make some sort of sign with his cold hands, and then he again began pleading piteously in his hoarse, hollow voice; but his words were just incoherent sounds, and again I could understand nothing. I brought everyone in the house to his bedside, offered him drinks; but he kept on sadly shaking his head. Finally I realized what he wanted. He was asking for the curtain at the window to be raised and the shutters to be opened. He doubtless wanted to look for the last time upon the day, upon God's earth, upon the sun. I pulled back the curtain; but the breaking day was sorrowful and sad, like the poor, fading life of the dying man. There was no sun. Clouds were spread across the sky in a misty shroud; it was so rainy, gloomy, sad. A light drizzle drummed against the window panes and bathed them in streams of cold, dirty water; it was dull and dark. The rays of pale day barely made their way into the room and scarcely challenged the flickering light of the lamp that was lit before the icon.

The dying man looked at me ever so sadly and shook his head. A minute later he was dead.

Anna Fyodorovna herself made the arrangements for the funeral. The simplest of coffins was bought and a drayman hired. To cover the expenses Anna Fyodorovna seized all the books and all the belongings of the deceased. The old man argued with her, kicked up a row, took as many books as he could away from her, stuffed them into all his pockets, filled his hat and whatever else he could with them, fussed over them all three days, and did not even part with them when it was time to go to the church. All those days he seemed to be in a frenzy, in a daze, and with a strange sort of solicitude he kept bustling about beside the coffin: now he would be adjusting the wreath on the dead man, now lighting or removing candles. It was apparent that his thoughts could not rest properly on anything. Neither my mother nor Anna Fyodorovna was in the church for the funeral service. Mother was ill, while Anna Fyodorovna was on the very point of going, but then had an argument with old Pokrovsky and stayed behind. Just I alone was there with the old man. During the service a sort of fear came over me, like a presentiment of the future. I was scarcely able to remain standing in the church. Finally the coffin was closed, the lid nailed down, it was put on the cart and off it went. I accompanied it only to the end of the street. The drayman drove at a trot. The old man ran behind him, crying loudly; running made his crying tremble and break. The poor thing dropped his hat and did not stop to pick it up. His head was getting wet in the rain; the wind was strengthening; the frost whipped and stung his face. The old man did not seem to notice the bad weather and ran crying from one side of the cart to the other. The tails of his tattered frock coat fluttered out in the wind like wings. Books poked out of all his pockets; there was some huge book in his arms to which he held on tight. Passers-by doffed their hats and crossed themselves. Some stopped to stare in wonder at the poor old man. Books were continually falling out of his pockets into the mud. People stopped him and pointed out his losses; he picked them up and set off once more in pursuit of the coffin. At the corner of the street some beggar woman joined with him to accompany the coffin. The cart finally turned the corner and disappeared from my sight. I went home. In dreadful anguish I threw myself upon my mother's breast. I squeezed her ever so tightly in my arms, kissing her and sobbing,

pressing up against her fearfully, as though trying to keep my last friend in my embrace and not give her up to death... But death was already standing over my poor mother! . . . . .

..

11th June

How grateful I am to you for yesterday's trip to the islands, Makar Alexeyevich! How nice and fresh it is there, what greenery there is there! It's so long since I saw any greenery; while I was ill, I kept on thinking I was going to die and that I was certain to do so; judge then, what I must have been experiencing yesterday, how I must have felt! Don't be angry with me for being so sad yesterday; I felt really well, really at ease, but at my very best moments I'm always sad for some reason. And the fact that I cried, that's nothing at all; I don't even know myself why I'm always crying. I feel things painfully, irritably; my impressions are morbid. The cloudless pale sky, the sunset, the hush of evening – all of that, but I just don't know, somehow I was in the mood to respond seriously, agonizingly to every impression yesterday, and so my heart was overflowing and my soul demanded tears. But why am I writing all this to you? It's difficult for my heart to grasp it all, and to relate it is more difficult still. But perhaps you will even understand me. Both the sadness and the laughter! How kind you are, truly, Makar Alexeyevich! Yesterday you kept looking into my eyes to read in them what I was feeling, and you were enraptured by my delight. Whether it was a little shrub, a tree-lined path, a strip of water – and there you were; always standing before me, preening yourself, and constantly gazing into my eyes, as if you were showing me your domains. That proves you have a kind heart, Makar Alexeyevich. And that's why I love you. Well, goodbye. I'm ill again today; I got my feet wet yesterday and as a result caught a cold; Fedora has got something wrong with her too, so we're both sick now. Don't forget me, come and visit often.

Your

V.D.

My sweet Varvara Alexeyevna!

And there was I thinking, my dear, that you'd describe all yesterday's doings to me in real poetry, but just one simple little sheet was all you managed. What I'm saying is that although you didn't write me very much on your little sheet, still on the other hand you described it unusually well and sweetly. Both the nature, and various rural scenes, and all the rest about feelings – in short, you described all of that very well. Whereas me now, I've got no talent. I can scribble ten pages if I want, nothing comes of it at all, I can't describe a thing. I've tried. You write to me, my dear, that I'm a kind, forgiving person, incapable of harming my neighbour, sensible of the Lord's bounty, manifested in nature, in short, you offer me various words of praise. It's all true, my dear, it's all absolutely true; I really am the way you say, I know it myself; but when I read the things you write, my heart is touched, like it or not, and then various distressing ideas occur. But just listen to me, my dear, I'll tell you something, my sweet.

I'll begin with the fact that I was just seventeen years old when I went into the service, and now my service career will already soon be hitting thirty. Well, it can't be denied, I've worn out my share of uniforms; I've matured, become wiser, seen a lot of people; I've spent some time, I can say that I've spent some time in the world, to the extent that once they even wanted to put me forward for a medal. Perhaps you don't believe it, but truly, I'm not lying to you. Well then, my dear, it was wicked people that did it all! But I can tell you, my dear, that even if I am an ignorant man, maybe a stupid man, still my heart is the same as anyone else's. So do you know, Varenka, what a wicked person did to me? But it's shameful to say what he did; you might ask – why did he do it? Just because I'm meek, just because I'm quiet, just because I'm kind! I wasn't to their liking, and so they started on me. At the beginning it began with them saying, "You, Makar Alexeyevich, are this and that"; and then it became, "Well, don't bother asking Makar Alexeyevich". And now they've finished up with, "Well, of course it's Makar Alexeyevich!" There, my dear, you see how it all progressed: everything blamed on Makar Alexeyevich; all they could do was make Makar Alexeyevich proverbial throughout our department. And it wasn't enough to make me proverbial and all but a term of abuse – they've had a go at my boots, my tunic, my hair,

my figure: nothing suits them, everything needs to be changed! And you know, all this is repeated from time immemorial every day God sends. I'm used to it, because I get used to everything, because I'm a meek man, because I'm a little man; but what's the reason for it all, though? What have I done wrong to anyone? Have I stolen anybody's rank or anything? Have I blackened anybody in front of our superiors? Asked for somebody else's bonus? Cooked up some plot or something? It'd be a sin even to think such a thing, my dear! How could I do all that? Just have a look and see, my dear, do I have capacity enough for cunning and ambition? So what reason is there, then, for such misfortunes to fall upon me, God forgive me? After all, you find me a worthy man, and you're incomparably better than all of them, my dear. After all, what is the greatest civic virtue? Yevstafy Ivanovich remarked the other day in a private conversation that the most important civic virtue is knowing how to coin it in. He said this as a little joke (I know it was a joke), yet the moral is that you shouldn't be a burden on anyone – but I'm not a burden on anyone! I have my own crust of bread; true, it's a simple crust of bread, at times it's even stale, but it's there, earned by my labours, consumed lawfully and irreproachably. Well what's to be done? After all, I know myself that I'm not doing much in copying things out, but all the same I'm proud of it: I work, I sweat. Well, and what's actually so bad about my copying things? What, is it a sin to copy things or something? "He copies things!" they say. "This bureaucratic rat," they say, "copies things!" Well, what's so dishonourable in that? My writing's so clear and nice, it's a pleasure to look at, and His Excellency is satisfied; I copy out the most important documents for him. Well, I have no literary style, I mean, I know it myself that I haven't got any, curse it; that's the very reason I've not been a success at work, and here I am now even writing to you, my dear, any old how, without any embellishments and as the thoughts come into my heart... I know all this; but if everyone started composing things, though, who then would do the copying? That's the question I'm posing, and I'm asking you to reply to it, my dear. Well, so I'm now conscious that I'm needed, that I'm essential, and that people shouldn't put somebody off with nonsense. Well, maybe I am a rat, if they've found a resemblance! But this here rat is needed, and the rat is useful, and people hold on to this here rat, and this here rat is getting a bonus –

that's what kind of rat it is! Still, that's enough about this topic, my dear; after all, I didn't even want to talk about it, but I got a bit carried away. All the same, it's nice to do yourself justice from time to time. Goodbye my dear, sweetheart, my kind little comforter! I'll visit, I'll be sure to visit you, I'll come and see how you are, my little flower. But don't you be bored in the meantime. I'll bring you a book. Well, goodbye then, Varenka.

Your sincere well-wisher

Makar Devushkin

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

I'm writing to you quickly, I'm in a hurry, I'm finishing a job to a deadline. The thing is, you see, there's a good buy to be had. Fedora says that some acquaintance of hers is selling a uniform, perfectly nice and new, underclothes, a waistcoat and cap, and it's all very cheap, so they say; so you should buy it. After all, you're not in any need now and you have some money; you say yourself you do. That's enough, please, don't be mean; for it's all necessary. Just look at yourself, what old clothes you go around in. It's shameful! Patched all over. And you don't have anything new; I know it, even though you assure me that you have. God alone knows what you've done with it. So do as I say and buy it please. Do it for me; if you love me, buy it.

You sent me some linen as a present; but listen, Makar Alexeyevich, you're spending all your money, you know. It's no joke, the amount you've spent on me – it's an awful lot of money! Ah, how you do love squandering it! I don't need it; it was all completely unnecessary. I know, I'm certain that you love me; truly, it's not necessary to remind me of it with presents, and it's hard for me to accept them from you; I know what they cost you. Once and for all – that's enough; do you hear? I beg you, I implore you. You ask me, Makar Alexeyevich, to send you the continuation of my notebook; you want me to finish it. I don't know how I even managed to write what I've written! But I won't have the strength now to talk about my past; I don't even want to think about it; those memories frighten me. And talking about my poor mother, who left her poor child as prey for those monsters, is most difficult of all. My heart bleeds at the memory alone. It's all still so fresh; I've not had the time to gather my thoughts, let alone calm down, although it's all more than a year ago now. But you know everything.

I told you about Anna Fyodorovna's current ideas; she keeps accusing me of ingratitude and rejects every accusation that she is in association with Mr Bykov! She invites me to go back to her; she says I'm a beggar and that I've taken the wrong path. She says that if I return to her, she takes it upon herself to set the whole business with Mr Bykov to rights and she'll force him to make amends for his blameworthiness before me. She says that Mr Bykov wants to give me a dowry. Who cares about them! I'm well enough here with you, with

my kind Fedora, whose attachment to me reminds me of my late nanny. You may be only my distant relation, yet you protect me with your name. Whereas I don't know them; I shall forget them if I can. What else do they want from me? Fedora says it's all gossip, that in the end they'll leave me alone. God grant it be so!

V.D.

21st June

My dear, my little sweetie!

I want to write, but I don't even know where to begin. I mean, how very strange it is, my dear, that you and I now live like this. What I'm saying is that I never spent my days in such happiness. Why, it's just as if the Lord had blessed me with a little house and family. My dearest little child, just what is this you're saying about the four shirts I sent you? I mean, you did need them – I found out from Fedora. And for me, my dear, it's a particular joy to please you; so it's my pleasure, so you leave me alone, my dear; leave me be and don't contradict me. Nothing of the sort ever happened to me, my dear. I've entered the world now, you see. Firstly, I'm living doubly, because you too live very close to me, and to my delight; and secondly, I was invited to tea today by one of the lodgers, my neighbour Ratazyayev, that same civil servant who has literary evenings. There's a gathering today; we're going to read some literature. That's the way we are now, my dear – there! Well, goodbye. I've written all this, you know, without any apparent purpose, and solely to inform you of my good fortune. You've let it be known through Tereza, darling, that you need some coloured silk for embroidery; I'll buy it, my dear, I'll buy it, I'll buy some silk too. And tomorrow I'll have the enjoyment of giving you complete satisfaction. I even know where to buy it. And I myself now remain

Your sincere friend  
Makar Devushkin

Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I am informing you, my dear, that ever such a pitiful occurrence has taken place in our apartment, truly, truly worthy of pity! Before five o'clock in the morning today Gorshkov's little boy died. I don't know what of, though, maybe some sort of scarlet fever or something, the Lord knows! I paid the Gorshkovs a visit. Why, my dear, how poor their room is! And what disorder! And it's no wonder: the whole family lives in one room, just divided up with screens for the sake of decency. They already have a little coffin in there – a simple, but quite nice little coffin; they bought it ready made, the boy was about nine; they say he was shaping up well. But it's pitiful looking at them, Varenka! The mother doesn't cry, but she's so sad, the poor woman. Things may even be easier for them, with one off their shoulders already, but they still have two left, a babe in arms and a little girl, she'll be a little over six or thereabouts. What a pleasant thing, indeed, to see: here's a child suffering, your own little child what's more, and there's not even anything just to help him! His father sits in his old, soiled tailcoat on a broken chair. His tears flow, and perhaps not even in grief, but just out of habit, there's a discharge from his eyes. He's so peculiar! He's always blushing when you start talking to him, he gets confused and doesn't know how to reply. The little girl, the daughter, stands leaning up against the coffin, and the poor little thing is so miserable and pensive! And I don't like it, Varenka, my dear, when a child gets pensive; it's not nice to look at! Some sort of rag doll lies on the floor beside her – she doesn't play; she holds her finger on her lips; stands there, not moving. The landlady gave her a sweet; she took it, but didn't eat it. It's sad, Varenka, isn't it?

Makar Devushkin

25th June

Kindest Makar Alexeyevich! I'm sending you back your book. It's the most worthless, horrid little book! It shouldn't even be picked up. Where did you dig up such a gem? Joking aside, surely you don't like such books, Makar Alexeyevich? I've been promised that in a few days something will be found for me to read. I'll share it with you too, if you like. But goodbye for now. Truly, there's no time to write any more.

V.D.

26th June

Dear Varenka! The fact is that I didn't actually read that horrid little book, my dear. True, I read a little bit, I can see that it's whimsy, just written merely for the sake of making you laugh, to amuse people; well, I think, it really ought to be entertaining; Varenka will probably like it too; and I went and sent it to you.

But now Ratazyayev has promised to give me something truly literary to read, well, then you'll have some books, my dear. That Ratazyayev knows his stuff, he's a real buff; he writes himself, and boy, how he writes! Such a lively pen and masses of style; in pretty much every word, that is, there's something, in the emptiest, in just the most ordinary, common word, so that even I could sometimes say to Faldoni or Tereza – look, even there he's got style. I go to his evenings too. We smoke tobacco and he reads to us, he reads for about five hours, and we keep listening. It's more lovely grub than literature! It's such a delight – flowers, simply flowers; make a bouquet out of every page! He's so courteous, kind, affectionate. Well what am I compared to him, well what? Nothing. He's a man with a reputation, and what am I? I simply don't exist, but he's well disposed even to me. I copy some things out for him. Only don't you think, Varenka, that there's some trickery going on here, and that it's precisely because of the fact that I do copying for him that he's well-disposed towards me. Don't you go believing gossip, my dear, don't you go believing base gossip! No, I do it from the heart, of my own free will, for his pleasure, and the fact that he favours me, well he does that for my pleasure. I understand the delicacy of the deed, my dear. He's a kind, a very kind man and an incomparable writer.

And it's a good thing, Varenka, literature, a very good thing; I learnt that from them a couple of days ago. A profound thing! A thing that strengthens people's hearts, instructs, and – there are all sorts of other things about all of this written in this book of theirs. Very well written! Literature is a picture, that is in a certain way a picture and a mirror; an expression of passion, a kind of subtle criticism, an exhortation to edification and a document. I picked all this up from them. I'll tell you frankly, my dear, that you sit amongst them, you know, you listen (and like them, you smoke a pipe as well, if you want), but when they start to compete and argue about various matters, then at that point I simply pass, at that point, my dear, you

and I will have to pass, pure and simple. At that point I simply turn out to be a complete idiot, I'm ashamed of myself, so that the whole evening you're looking out for a way to get even so much as half a word into the general topic, but that very half a word, as if on purpose, isn't even there! And you feel sorry, Varenka, about yourself, that you're just not up to it; that, as the saying goes, you've been better fed than taught. After all, what do I do now in my spare time? I sleep like an utter fool. Whereas instead of unnecessary sleeping, I could get on with something that was pleasant too; such as sitting down and doing a bit of writing. It's both beneficial for you and good for others. I mean, you just take a look at how much they earn, my dear, may the Lord forgive them! There's Ratazyayev even – how he earns! What is it to him to write a sheet? Why, on some days he's even written five, and he says he earns three hundred roubles a sheet. Some little anecdote or other, or something curious – five hundred, pay up, no argument, just pay up! If not – then we put as much as a thousand in our pockets next time! What about that, Varvara Alexeyevna? But that's not all! He has a little notebook of poems, and the poems are all kind of small – seven thousand, my dear, he's asking seven thousand, just think. I mean, that's a land holding, that's a significant house! He says they're offering him five thousand, but he isn't taking it. I reason with him, saying "take the five thousand from them, old chap, and then be done with them – after all, five thousand is real money!" No, he says, they'll give me seven, the villains. He really is so full of tricks!

So then, my dear, since we're on the subject, so be it, I'll copy out for you a bit from *Italian Passions*. That's the name of his composition. Just read this then, Varenka, and judge for yourself:

“...Vladimir shuddered, and passions began to bubble up violently within him, and his blood boiled...

“Countess,’ he cried, ‘Countess! Do you know how terrible is this passion, how boundless this madness? No, my dreams did not deceive me! I am in love, rapturously, violently, madly in love! All your husband's blood cannot quench the violent, bubbling rapture of my soul! Trifling obstacles cannot check the all-destructive fire of hell that harrows my exhausted breast. Oh Zinaida, Zinaida!...’

“Vladimir!” whispered the countess, beside herself, inclining towards his shoulder...

“Zinaida!” cried the enraptured Smelsky.

“A sigh was exhaled from his breast. The fire flared up with a bright flame on the altar of love and harrowed the breasts of the unfortunate sufferers.

“Vladimir!...’ whispered the countess in ecstasy. Her breast rose, her cheeks were crimson, her eyes burned...

“A new, dreadful marriage was concluded! . . . . .

. . . . .

“Half an hour later the old count entered his wife’s boudoir.

“Well then, darling, should we not order the samovar to be prepared for our dear guest?” he said, giving his wife’s cheek a tweak.”

There you are. I ask you, my dear, after that – well, how do you find it? True, it’s a little loose, there’s no question about that, but then again, it’s good. How good it is, it’s so good. And then allow me to copy out another little fragment for you from the tale *Yermak and Zyuleika*:

Imagine, my dear, that the Cossack Yermak, the wild and terrible conqueror of Siberia, is in love with Zyuleika, daughter of the ruler of Siberia, Kuchum, and whom he has taken captive. An event straight out of the age of Ivan the Terrible, as you can see. Here’s a conversation between Yermak and Zyuleika:

“You love me, Zyuleika! Oh repeat it, repeat it!...’

“I love you, Yermak,’ whispered Zyuleika.

“Heaven and earth, I thank you! I am happy!... You have given me everything, everything to which my agitated soul has aspired since the days of my adolescence. So this is where you were leading me, my guiding star; so this is why you led me here, beyond the Stone Girdle! I shall display my Zyuleika to the whole world, and men, those violent monsters, will not dare to blame me! Oh, if these secret sufferings of her tender soul are comprehensible to them, if they are capable of seeing an entire epic poem in my Zyuleika’s one teardrop! Oh, let me wipe away that teardrop with kisses, let me drink it, that heavenly teardrop... unearthly one!”

“Yermak,’ said Zyuleika, ‘the world is wicked, men are unjust. They will persecute, they will condemn us, my sweet Yermak! What will a poor maiden who has grown up in her father’s yurt amidst her native Siberian snows do in your cold, icy, soulless, vain world? Men will not understand me, my beloved, my love!”

“Then a Cossack sabre will whistle as it is brandished on high

above them!' cried Yermak, his eyes wandering wildly."

And what about Yermak now, Varenka, when he finds out his Zyuleika has had her throat cut. The blind elder Kuchum, using the darkness of the night and in the absence of Yermak, has slipped into his tent and cut his daughter's throat, wanting to deliver a mortal blow to Yermak, who has deprived him of his sceptre and crown.

"How it gives me pleasure to strike iron against stone!" shouted Yermak in a wild frenzy, whetting his knife of damask steel on the shaman's stone. 'I must have their blood, their blood! They must be hewn, hewn, hewn!!!'

And after all this, Yermak, lacking the strength to live without his Zyuleika, throws himself into the River Irtysh, and that's how it all ends.

Well and what about this, for example, just a little fragment in a comically descriptive mode, written strictly to make you laugh:

"Do you know Ivan Prokofyevich Zheltopuz? Well, the same one that bit Prokofy Ivanovich's leg. Ivan Prokofyevich is a man of difficult character, but at the same time of rare virtue; but on the other hand Prokofy Ivanovich is extremely fond of radishes with honey. And when Pelageya Antonovna was still acquainted with them... But do you know Pelageya Antonovna? Why, the same one that always puts her skirt on inside out."\*"

I mean, it's just hilarious, Varenka, simply hilarious! We were rolling around laughing while he was reading us that. What a man, may the Lord forgive him! Anyway, my dear, it may be a bit whimsical, and just too playful, but at the same time it's innocent, without the slightest hint of free thinking or liberal ideas. It should be noted, my dear, that Ratazyayev is of excellent conduct and is for that reason a superb writer, unlike other writers.

And indeed, I mean, sometimes you do get an idea come into your head... well then, if I were to write something, well what would happen then? Well then, for example, let's suppose that suddenly, without warning, there appeared a book under the title *The Poems of Makar Devushkin!* Well what would you say then, my little angel? How would you look on, what would you think of that? And I'll tell you for my own part, my dear, that when that book of mine appeared, I'd definitely not dare to show myself on Nevsky Avenue then. I mean, what would it be like when everyone could say that "here comes the

composer of literature and poet, Devushkin", that "that really is Devushkin himself"! Well what would I do then, for example, with my boots? I'll remark to you in passing, my dear, that they're almost always patched, and what's more the soles, to tell the truth, are coming away at times most improperly. Well what would happen then, when everyone found out that Devushkin the writer has patched boots! Some *contesse-duchesse* or other would find out, well and what would she say, the dear? Perhaps she wouldn't even notice; for I assume that *contesses* have nothing to do with boots, let alone a clerk's boots, (because, after all, there are boots and boots), but she'd be told about everything, my own friends would give me away. Ratazyayev there would be the first to give me away; he pays calls on Countess V.; he says he's always there, he visits her informally too. He says she's such a dear, she's a literary sort of lady, he says. He's a scallywag, that Ratazyayev!

But that's enough on that topic anyway; I'm writing all this, my little angel, just for fun, you know, to entertain you. Goodbye, sweetheart! I've scribbled down a lot for you here, but it's actually because I'm in the most cheerful frame of mind today. We all had lunch together today with Ratazyayev, and (they're so naughty, my dear!) they passed around such a sweet wine... well, why should I be writing to you about that! You just be sure you don't invent anything about me, Varenka. I mean, all this means nothing. I'll send some books, I'll be sure to send some. A work by Paul de Kock is being passed around here, only you won't be getting any Paul de Kock,\* my dear... No, no! Paul de Kock isn't suitable for you. What they say about him, my dear, is that he makes all the St Petersburg critics nobly indignant. I'm sending you a pound of sweets – I bought them specially for you. Eat them up, my poppet, and think of me with every sweet. Only don't you chew the fruit-drops, just suck on them, or else your little teeth will start aching. But perhaps you like candied peel too? You write and tell me. Well, goodbye then, goodbye. May the Lord be with you, sweetheart. And I shall remain

Your most faithful friend

Makar Devushkin

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

Fedora says that if I wish it, some people will be glad to take an interest in my situation and obtain for me a very good post as a governess in a certain house. What do you think, my friend – should I go or not? Of course, I shan't be a burden on you then, and the post seems to be an advantageous one, but on the other hand, it's horrible somehow to go into an unfamiliar household. They're landowners of some sort. They'll start finding things out about me, they'll begin asking questions, being curious – well, what will I say then? What's more, I'm so unsociable, so wild; I like to feel at home in a corner I'm used to and stay for a long time. It's somehow better in a place you're accustomed to: you may not have an easy life, but it's better all the same. And moving in with them, what's more; and then God knows what the work will be like; perhaps they'll just make you nurse the children. And there's the people too; this is their third governess they're changing in two years. Do advise me, Makar Alexeyevich, for God's sake, should I go or not? And why is it you never come to visit me in person? You just look in from time to time. At mass on Sundays is almost the only time we see each other. What an unsociable person you are! You're just like me! And after all, I am almost family. You don't love me, Makar Alexeyevich, and sometimes I'm very sad by myself. There are times, especially in the twilight, you're sitting there all on your own, Fedora goes off somewhere. You sit thinking and thinking – you remember all the old things, both the joyous and the sad – it all passes before your eyes, it's all glimpsed as if through a mist. Familiar faces appear (I begin seeing them almost for real) – most often of all I see my mother... And what dreams I have! I feel my health is ruined; I'm so weak; I had a bad turn today too, when I was getting out of bed in the morning, and on top of that I've got such a bad cough! I feel that I shall die soon, I know it. And who will bury me? And who will follow my coffin? And who will feel sorry for me?... And so perhaps I shall be obliged to die in a strange place, in a strange house, in a strange corner!... My God, what a sad life it is, Makar Alexeyevich! Why is it, my friend, you keep on feeding me sweets? I truly don't know where it is you get so much money from. Ah my friend, look after your money, for God's sake look after it. Fedora is selling the rug I embroidered; they're giving fifty paper

roubles. That's very good: I thought it would be less. I'll give Fedora three silver roubles and I'll sew myself a dress, just a nice simple one, but a warm one. I'll make you a waistcoat, I'll make it myself and I'll choose some good material.

Fedora got a book for me – *The Tales of Belkin*,\* which I'm sending you, in case you want to read it. Only please don't get it dirty and don't keep it too long; it's somebody else's book; it's a work by Pushkin. Two years ago my mother and I read these tales together, and it was so sad for me rereading them now. If you have any books then send them to me – but only in the event that you've got them from someone other than Ratazyayev. He'll probably give you something of his own composition, if he's had anything published. How is it that you like his works, Makar Alexeyevich? Such nonsense... Well, goodbye! How I've chattered on! When I'm sad, I'm glad to chatter about anything at all. It's a medicine: you feel better straight away, and especially if you express everything that's in your heart. Goodbye, goodbye, my friend!

Your  
V.D.

My dear, Varvara Alexeyevna!

Enough of this lamentation! You really should be ashamed of yourself! Come now, my little angel; how is it you get such ideas? You're not ill, sweetheart, not ill at all; you're blooming, truly blooming; a little pale, but blooming all the same. And what are these dreams and visions you're having? You should be ashamed, my dear, come now; just you spit on these dreams, simply spit. Why is it I sleep well? Why is it there's nothing wrong with me? You take a look at me, my dear. I live my life, sleep peacefully, I'm fit as a fiddle, fresh as a daisy, it's a pleasure to see. Come now, come now, sweetheart, you should be ashamed. Pull yourself together. I mean, I know that little head of yours, my dear, no sooner has it come across something or other than you've started dreaming and grieving about something. Stop it for my sake, dear. Become a servant? Never! No, no, no! And whatever are you thinking of, what's come over you? And moving out, what's more! Oh no, my dear, I won't allow it, I take up arms with all my strength against such an intention. I'll sell my old tailcoat and walk the streets in nothing but my shirt, but we're simply not going to have you in need. No, Varenka, no. I know you! It's fancy, pure fancy! But what's for sure is that Fedora alone is to blame for everything: she's clearly a silly woman and has put all this into your head. But don't you trust her, my dear. And I don't suppose you know everything yet, sweetheart?... She's a silly woman, shrewish and cantankerous; she hounded her late husband to his grave too. Or she's probably made you angry somehow. No, no, my dear, not for anything! And what will happen to me then, what will remain for me to do? No, Varenka, sweetheart, you put it out of your little head. What do you lack here with us? We take delight in you, you love us – so go on living quietly over there, do some sewing or read, or perhaps don't do the sewing – it's all the same, only live with us. Otherwise, you judge for yourself, well what will it be like then?... I'll get you some books, and then perhaps we'll get together again to go for a walk somewhere. Only come now, my dear, come now, you must be sensible and not fill your head with nonsense! I'll come and see you, and in a very short time, only in return you accept my direct and frank admission: it's wrong, sweetheart, very wrong! Of course I'm not an educated man and I know myself that I'm not educated, that I had a poor boy's schooling,

but that's not what I want to talk about, it's not me that's the point here, but I'll stand up for Ratazyayev, if you don't mind. He's my friend, and for that reason I'll stand up for him. He writes well, he writes very, very, and once again very well. I don't agree with you, and can't agree with you at all. It's written colourfully, abruptly, with figures, there are various ideas; it's very good! Perhaps you were reading without feeling, Varenka, or you were in a bad mood when you were reading, you were angry with Fedora about something, or something bad had happened to you. No, you just read it with feeling, a bit better, when you're happy and cheerful and you're in a good frame of mind, like, for example, when you've got a sweet in your mouth – read it then. I don't argue (who could be against it?), there are writers better still than Ratazyayev, there are even those much better still, but both they are good and Ratazyayev is good; they write well and he writes well. He does his writing and he does it all right, and he does a very good thing in doing his writing. Well goodbye, my dear; I can't write any more; I need to hurry, I've got something to do. See to it, my dear, my precious little flower, keep calm, and may the Lord remain with you, while I remain

Your faithful friend  
Makar Devushkin

PS: Thank you for the book, my dear, we'll read Pushkin too; but today I'll definitely come and see you in the evening.

My dear Makar Alexeyevich!

No, my friend, no, it's no life for me amongst you. I've thought it over and find that I'm very wrong to refuse such an advantageous post. There I'll at least be sure of a crust of bread; I'll try hard, I'll earn the affection of strangers, I'll even try to change my character if needs be. Of course it's painful and hard living among strangers, looking for charity from strangers, hiding yourself away and constraining yourself, but God will help me. I really can't remain unsociable for ever. I've already had similar experiences. I remember when I was still small and going to the boarding school. The whole of Sunday I'd be playing and jumping about at home, sometimes my mother would even scold – but all was well, all was good in my heart and bright in my soul. Evening would start to approach, and a deathly sadness would take hold, I needed to go to the boarding school at nine o'clock, and everything there was strange, cold and strict, the governesses were so bad-tempered on Mondays, it was as if my spirit was being squeezed, I felt like crying; I'd go into a corner and have a little cry all on my own, hiding the tears – I'd be called lazy, but it wasn't even about having to study that I was crying at all. And what happened? I got used to it, and then later on, when I was leaving the boarding school, I cried as well, saying goodbye to my friends. And I'm doing wrong, being a burden on the two of you. This idea is torment for me. I'm telling you all this frankly because I'm used to being frank with you. Don't I see how Fedora gets up ever so early every day and gets on with her washing and works late into the night? And old bones like some rest. Don't I see that all your money is going on me, you're putting your last copeck on the table and spending it on me? Not with your fortune, my friend! You write that you'll sell your last possession, but you won't leave me in need. I believe it, my friend, I believe in your kind heart – but it's now that you speak like this. Now you have some unexpected money, you've received a bonus, but later on what will happen, later on? You know it yourself – I'm always ill; I can't work the way you do, although I would be only too glad, and there isn't always work to be had. So what remains for me? To be torn apart in anguish looking at the two of you, both so kind. How can I be of even the least use to you? And why am I so essential to you, my friend? What good have I done you? I am simply attached to you with

all my soul, I love you very much, deeply, with all my heart, but –  
bitter is my fate! – I know how to love and am able to love, and that's  
all, but not to create wealth, not to repay you for your good deeds.  
Don't keep me then any longer, have a think and tell me your final  
opinion. In expectation I remain

Your loving

V.D.

Whimsy, whimsy, Varenka, simply whimsy! Just go and leave you, and what won't you think over with that little head of yours. This isn't right and that isn't right! But I can see now that it's all whimsy. What is it you lack with us then, my dear, just tell me that! You're loved, you love us, we're all contented and happy – what else is there? Well and what are you going to do among strangers? I mean, you probably don't yet know what a stranger is?... No, you be so good as to ask me about it, and I'll tell you what a stranger is. I know him, my dear, I know him well; I've had occasion to eat his bread. He's angry, Varenka, angry, so very angry that if your little heart is wanting, he tears it apart with a complaint, a reproach and a nasty look. You're nice and warm with us – as if you'd found refuge in a little nest. And you'll leave us headless, in a way, too. Well what will we do without you; what will I, an old man, do then? We don't need you? You're of no use? How do you mean, of no use? No, my dear, you judge for yourself, how can you be no use? You're of great use to me, Varenka. You have this beneficial influence... Here I am thinking of you now, and I'm cheerful... I write you a letter sometimes and set out all my feelings in it, to which I receive a detailed reply from you. I've bought you a bit of a wardrobe, had a hat made; at times you send me some errand and I... No, how can you be no use? And then what am I going to do alone in my old age, what will I be good for? Perhaps you didn't even think of that, Varenka; no, you think precisely of that – "what, then, what will he be good for without me then?" I've grown used to you, my dear. Otherwise what will come of it? I'll go down to the Neva, and that'll be the end of it. Yes, it's the truth, that's how it'll be, Varenka; what else will there remain for me to do without you? Ah, sweetheart, Varenka! Clearly you want a drayman to cart me away to the Volkovo cemetery; some common old beggar woman alone to accompany my coffin, you want them to scatter sand on top of me, then go away and leave me there alone. It's a sin, a sin, my dear! Truly, it's a sin, I swear to God, it is! I'm sending you back your book, my little friend, Varenka, and if, my little friend, you ask my opinion regarding your book, then I shall say that in all my life I've not had occasion to read such splendid books. I ask myself now, my dear, how is it that I lived like such an oaf before, may the Lord forgive me? What was I doing? What forests have I come from? I mean, I know

nothing, my dear, I know precisely nothing! I know nothing at all! I'll tell you straight, Varenka – I'm not an educated man; until now I've read little, I've read very little, almost nothing: I've read *A Picture of a Man*, a wise composition; I've read *The Boy Who Plays Various Things on the Bells* and *The Cranes of Ibucus*\* – that's all, and I've never read anything more. Now I've read 'The Postmaster'\* here in your book; you know, what I'll say to you, my dear, is that sometimes it happens that you're alive, but you don't know that right alongside you there you've got this book, where the whole of your life is laid out in detail. And things that never occurred to you yourself previously, well here, as you begin to read in this book, bit by bit you yourself remember them, and you discover and divine the meaning of them. And finally, this is also what I came to love your book for: some other work, whatever it might be, you read and read till you're fit to burst sometimes – and it's so complicated that it's as if you don't even understand it. I, for example, I'm dim, I'm dim by nature, so I can't read works that are too important; but you read this – it's like I wrote it myself, it's as if, to give an example, my own heart, such as it is, he took it, turned it inside out for people and described everything in detail – that's what! And it's a simple matter, my God; nothing to it! Truly, I would have written it the same way too; why shouldn't I have written it? After all, I feel the same too, just absolutely like in the book, and I too have at times been in such situations myself as, to give an example, this Samson Vyrin, the poor man. And how many Samson Vyrins are there among us, just such warm-hearted, hapless men! And how cleverly everything is described! I almost shed tears, my dear, when I read that he'd turned to drink, the sinner, so that he'd lost his senses, become a drunkard and slept the whole day under a sheepskin coat, and drowned his sorrows with grog, and cried piteously, wiping his eyes with his dirty coat flap, when he remembered his lost sheep, his daughter Dunyasha! No, it's like real life! You read it; it's like real life! It lives! I've seen it myself – all of it lives near me; there's Tereza, if you like – why go further afield? – there's our poor civil servant too, if you like – after all, perhaps he's just as much a Samson Vyrin, only he has a different name, *Gorshkov*. It's a common business, my dear, and it could happen to you and to me. And the count that lives on Nevsky Avenue or the embankment, he too will be the same, he'll just seem to be different, because they have everything their own way, in

the very best tone, but he too will be the same, anything could happen, and the same thing could happen to me too. That's the way it is, my dear, and here you are wanting to leave us too; but, you know, Varenka, sin could take me unawares. And you could ruin both yourself and me, my dear. Ah, you little flower of mine, for God's sake turn all those wilful thoughts out of your little head and don't torment me for no reason. Well how are you, my weak, unfledged little nestling, how are you to feed yourself, to keep yourself from ruin, to defend yourself from villains? Come now, Varenka, pull yourself together; don't listen to nonsensical advice and slanders, but read your book again, read it attentively; it'll be of benefit to you.

I talked to Ratazyayev about 'The Postmaster'. He told me that it's all old-fashioned and that books now all have pictures and various descriptions;\* now I didn't really take in very well what it was he was saying there. He concluded that Pushkin is good and that he brought glory to Holy Russia, and he told me a lot of other things about him. Yes, it's very good, Varenka, very good; you read the book again attentively, follow my advice and make me, an old man, happy by your obedience. Then the Lord Himself will reward you, my dear, He'll be sure to reward you.

Your sincere friend  
Makar Devushkin

6th July

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

Fedora brought me fifteen silver roubles today. How glad she was, the poor thing, when I gave her three of them! I'm writing to you in haste. I'm cutting you a waistcoat now – the material's lovely – yellow with little flowers. I'm sending you a book; it's all different stories in it; I've read some of them; read one of them with the title 'The Greatcoat'.\* You're trying to persuade me to go to the theatre with you; won't that be expensive? Only if it's somewhere in the gallery. I've not been to the theatre for ever such a long time now, truly, I don't even remember when it was. Only again I'm still afraid that this plan will cost a lot. Fedora only shakes her head. She says you've started living completely beyond your means, and I can see that for myself; how much you've spent on me alone! See that nothing bad should come of it, my friend. As it is, Fedora has been telling me about some rumours – that it seems you've had an argument with your landlady about not paying her some money; I'm very afraid for you. Well, goodbye; I'm in a hurry. I've got a little job to do; I'm changing the ribbons on my hat.

V.D.

PS: Do you know, if we go to the theatre, then I'll put on my new hat and wear my black mantilla on my shoulders. Will that look nice?

Dear Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

... So then, I'm still talking about yesterday's business. Yes, my dear, we were struck by whimsy too in days of old. I fell for this little actress, fell head over heels, yet that would still have been nothing; but the oddest thing was the fact that I hardly saw her at all, went to the theatre just once, and fell for her all the same. At that time there were about five young people of the very excitable kind living right next door to me. I fell in with them, fell in unwittingly, although I always kept within the bounds of propriety in relation to them. Well, so as not to be left out, I too would agree with them about everything. They talked a lot to me about this actress! Every evening, as soon as the theatre's on, the whole company – they never had two coins to rub together for any essentials – the whole company set out for the theatre, to the gallery, and they'd just clap and clap and call and call for this actress – they'd just go crazy! And then they won't let you go to sleep; they're talking about her the whole night long, each one calls her "his Glasha", they're all in love with her alone, they all have the same songbird in their hearts. They got defenceless little me excited as well; I was still a youngster then. I don't know myself how I came to be at the theatre with them, in the fourth tier, in the gallery. As far as seeing goes, I could see only the edge of the curtain, but on the other hand I could hear everything. The little actress really did have a pretty little voice – ringing, like a nightingale, honeyed! We all clapped our hands off, we shouted and shouted – in short, we all but had to be dealt with, and one of us did get led out, it's true. I got home – it was as if I was walking around drunk! Only one silver rouble was left in my pocket, and it was a good ten days till payday. So what would you think, my dear? The next day, before going to work, I dropped in to a French perfumer's, spent all my capital buying some scent or other and some nice-smelling soap from him – I don't even know myself why I bought all of that then. And I didn't have dinner at home, but kept on walking past her windows. She lived on Nevsky Avenue on the third floor. I went home, rested there for an hour or so, and went back to Nevsky again, just so as to walk past her windows. I went about like that for a month and a half, running after her; I was continually hiring smart cabs and kept on going up and down past her windows; I got myself absolutely tired out, got into debt, and then I

fell out of love with her too; I got fed up with it! So that's what an actress is capable of doing to a decent man, my dear! But I was a youngster though, a youngster then!...

M.D.

My dear Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

Your book, received by me on the 6th of this month, I hasten to return to you and at the same time hasten in this my letter to have things out with you. It's a bad thing, my dear, a bad thing that you've reduced me to such an extremity. Allow me, my dear: every condition is determined by the Almighty to the lot of man. It is determined that one is to wear a general's epaulettes, another to be a titular councillor\* in the civil service; this one is to command, and that one to obey, uncomplaining and in fear. It is already calculated according to a man's capability; one man is capable of one thing, and another of another thing, and the capabilities are arranged by God Himself. I've been in the service for about thirty years now; I work irreproachably, am of sober conduct, have never been detected in disorderly behaviour. As a citizen, with my own consciousness I consider myself to have my shortcomings, but at the same time my virtues too. I'm respected by my superiors, and his Excellency himself is satisfied with me, and although to this day he has not yet given me any particular signs of favour, still I know that he is satisfied. I've lived long enough to turn grey; I don't know of any great sins on my part. Of course, who isn't sinful in little things? Everyone's sinful, and even you are sinful, my dear! But I've never been detected in major misdeeds or misdemeanours, doing anything against regulations or in breach of public order, I've never been detected in that, it hasn't happened; a medal was even on its way – well, what of it! All this in conscience you ought to have known, my dear, and he ought to have known it; if he took it upon himself to give a description, then he ought to have known everything. No, I didn't expect this from you, my dear; no, Varenka! I didn't expect such a thing, particularly from you.

What! So after this you can't even live your life quietly in your own little corner – whatever it might be like – live without muddying any water, as the saying goes, bothering nobody, knowing the fear of God and yourself, in such a way that you aren't bothered either, so that no one forces their way into your kennel to spy on you and say: "how do you manage there in the domestic line, have you got, for example, a nice waistcoat, do you have the underwear that you ought to have; have you got boots and how are they soled; what do you eat, what do you drink, what do you copy?"... And what's so wrong with the fact,

my dear, that perhaps I do sometimes go on tiptoe where the roadway isn't so good, the fact that I look out for my boots! Why write about another person that he's sometimes in need, that he doesn't drink tea? And it's as if everybody really ought to drink tea then without fail! And do I look into everyone's mouths saying "what's that he's chewing?" Who is it I've upset like that? No, my dear, why upset other people, when they don't bother you! Well and here's an example for you, Varvara Alexeyevna, this is what it means: you're working away, earnestly, diligently – right! – and your superiors themselves respect you (whatever the case, still they respect you all the same) – and then right under your very nose, for no apparent reason, without any warning, somebody gives you a real roasting. Of course, it's true, at times you have something new made for yourself – you're glad, you don't sleep, you're so glad, you put on new boots, for example, so voluptuously – it's true, I've felt that, because it's nice seeing your leg in a fine, smart boot – that's accurately described! But all the same, I'm genuinely surprised at how Fyodor Fyodorovich let such a book pass without attention and didn't stand up for himself. It's true that he's still a young dignitary and likes to do a bit of shouting occasionally, but why not do a bit of shouting? And why not give someone a roasting too, if the likes of us need a roasting? Well, let's suppose it's just, for example, roasting someone for the sake of tone – well, it can be done for the sake of tone too; training's needed; a warning needs giving; because – and this is between you and me, Varenka – the likes of us won't do anything without a warning, we all try just to be on the books somewhere, so as to say "I do such and such a job", but we're shirking and skiving all the time. And as there are multiple ranks, and each rank demands to be roasted in absolute accordance with rank, it's natural that after that the tone of roasting turns out multiranking too – it's in the order of things! And you know, that's what holds society together, my dear, the fact that we all set the tone for one another, that we all give one another a roasting. Without this precaution society couldn't hold together and there'd be no order. I'm genuinely surprised at how Fyodor Fyodorovich let such an insult pass without attention!

And what's such a thing written for? And what's it necessary for? So will one of the readers have a greatcoat made for me as a result of this, or something? Will he buy me new boots, or something? No,

Varenka, he'll read it through and then demand a sequel. You hide sometimes, you hide, you conceal yourself inside whatever you've got, you're afraid at times to poke your nose out – anywhere at all, because you tremble in the face of gossip, because out of everything that could be found on earth, out of everything they'll make you a satire, and then the whole of your civic and family life goes around in literature, everything is published, read, mocked, gossiped about! And then you won't even be able to show yourself in the street; I mean, it's all so well demonstrated here, that now you can recognize the likes of us just by the way we walk. Well, it would have been all right if he had at least turned over a new leaf towards the end, toned things down, included something, for example, even after the point where they scattered paper on his head, such as "despite all this he was a virtuous and good citizen, did not deserve such treatment from his colleagues, did the bidding of his superiors (here some example could be given), wished nobody any harm, believed in God and was mourned when he died" (if he really must have him die). But best of all would be not to leave him to die, the poor thing, but make it so that his greatcoat was found, so that the general, learning in greater detail of his virtues, asked to have him transferred to his own office, promoted him and gave him a good salary, so you can see how it would be: evil would be punished and virtue would triumph, and his colleagues in the office would all be left with nothing. I, for example, would have done it like that; for otherwise, what's he got here that's so special, what's he got here that's so good? It's just some trivial example from mundane, nasty, everyday life. And how did you come to make up your mind to send me such a book, my dear? I mean, it's an ill-intentioned book, Varenka; it's simply unrealistic, because it couldn't be the case that such a clerk existed. And I mean, after something like that you've got to make a complaint, Varenka, a formal complaint.

Your most humble servant  
Makar Devushkin

27th July

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

The latest events and your letters frightened me, astonished me and threw me into bewilderment, but Fedora's accounts have made everything clear to me. Yet why did you have to despair so and fall into the sort of abyss into which you have fallen, Makar Alexeyevich? Your explanations didn't satisfy me at all. You see, was I not right when insisting on taking that advantageous post I was offered? What's more, my latest incident really does frighten me too. You say your love for me forced you to hold back from me. Even when you were claiming that you were spending on me only money you had in reserve, money which, as you said, you had in the bank in case of need, even then I could already see that I owed you a great deal. But now that I've learnt that you had no money at all, that after finding out by chance about my needy situation and being touched by it, you made up your mind to spend your salary, which you took in advance, and sold even your clothes when I was ill – now I'm put in such an agonizing position by this discovery, that I still don't know how to take it all and what to think about it. Ah, Makar Alexeyevich! You should have stopped at your first good deeds, to which you were inspired by compassion and kindred feelings, and not wasted money subsequently on unnecessary things. You've betrayed our friendship, Makar Alexeyevich, because you haven't been open with me, and now, when I see that all you had has gone on smart clothes, on sweets, on outings, on the theatre and books for me – I'm now paying dear for it all in regret over my unforgivable thoughtlessness (for I accepted everything from you without worrying about you yourself), and everything with which you wanted to give me pleasure has now turned to woe for me and left in its wake only useless regret. I've noticed your anguish recently, and although I've been anxiously awaiting something myself, still what has happened now did not even occur to me. What! Could you have lost heart to such a degree already, Makar Alexeyevich? But what will everyone who knows you think of you now, what will they say about you now? You, whom I and everybody else respected for kindness of spirit, modesty and good sense, you have now suddenly fallen into such repulsive vice, in which, apparently, you've never been detected before. What came over me when Fedora told me you'd been found in the street in a

drunken state and brought to the apartment accompanied by the police! I was rooted to the ground in astonishment, even though I was expecting something unusual, because you'd been missing for four days. But have you thought, Makar Alexeyevich, about what your superiors will say when they learn the true reason for your absence? You say that everyone laughs at you; that everyone has found out about the bond between us and that your neighbours refer to me too in their mockery. Pay no attention to it, Makar Alexeyevich, and for God's sake calm down. I'm also frightened by your incident with these officers, I've heard about it vaguely. Explain to me, what does it all mean? You write that you were afraid of being open with me, afraid of losing my friendship through your confession, that you were in despair, not knowing how to help in my sickness, that you sold everything in order to support me and not allow me into hospital, that you got into debt as far as you could and have problems with your landlady every day – yet concealing all this from me, you chose the worse path. And now I've found out everything after all. You were embarrassed about making me admit that I was the reason for your unfortunate position, yet now you've brought twice as much woe upon me with your behaviour. All this has amazed me, Makar Alexeyevich. Ah, my friend, misfortune is an infectious disease. The poor and unfortunate should avoid one another, so as not to become even more infected. I've brought misfortunes upon you such as you'd not suffered before in your modest and secluded life. All this is torturing and killing me.

Write to me frankly now about everything that's happened to you and how you resolved to do such a thing. Calm me, if you can. It isn't self-esteem that makes me now write about my calm, but my friendship and love for you, which nothing can erase from my heart. Goodbye. I await your reply with impatience. You thought badly of me, Makar Alexeyevich.

Your sincerely loving  
Varvara Dobroselova

My priceless Varvara Alexeyevna!

Well then, as everything is over now and everything is little by little returning to its former state, this then is what I'll say to you, my dear: you're worried about what people will think of me, to which I make haste to announce to you, Varvara Alexeyevna, that my pride is dearer to me than anything. In consequence of which, and in reporting to you about my misfortunes and all these disturbances, I can inform you that none of my superiors knows anything yet, and won't know either, so they'll all have respect for me as previously. I'm afraid of one thing: I'm afraid of gossip. The landlady at our house shouts, but now that, with the help of your ten roubles, I've paid off a part of my debt to her, she only grumbles and no more. As far as the others are concerned, they're all right as well; you just don't need to ask to borrow money from them, because otherwise they're all right as well. And in conclusion to my explanations I'll tell you, my dear, that I hold your respect for me above anything in the world, and I console myself with that now during my temporary disturbances. Thank God that the first shock and the first unpleasantness are over and you took it in such a way that you don't consider me a treacherous friend and egotist because, lacking the strength to part with you and loving you as my little angel, I kept you near me and deceived you. I've set about my work zealously now and started carrying out my duties well. If only Yevstafy Ivanovich had spoken a word when I passed him yesterday! I won't conceal from you, my dear, that my debts and the poor state of my wardrobe are killing me, but again that's nothing, and regarding that too, I beseech you, don't despair, my dear. You send me another fifty-copeck piece, Varenka, and that fifty-copeck piece pierced my heart for me. So that's the way it's become now, so that's how it is! That is, it's not I, an old fool, that's helping you, a little angel, but you, my poor little orphan, helping me! Fedora did well, getting some money. I have no hope for the moment, my dear, of receiving any, but if any hopes revive a little, I'll write off to you about it all in detail. Yet gossip, gossip worries me most of all. Goodbye, my little angel. I kiss your hand and beg you to get well. The reason I'm not writing in detail is that I'm hurrying to work, for by my diligence and zeal I want to make up for all my faults and omissions in my duties; I'm putting off the continuation of the

narrative about all the occurrences and about the incident with the officers until the evening.

Your respectful and your sincerely loving

Makar Devushkin

Ah, Varenka, Varenka! It's just precisely now that the fault is on your part and will remain on your conscience. You knocked the last bit of sense out of me with your letter, perplexed me, and it's only now, when I've delved into the depths of my heart at leisure, that I've seen that I was right, I was absolutely right. I'm not talking about my shindy (forget it, my dear, forget it), but about the fact that I love you and that it wasn't at all unwise for me to love you, not at all unwise. You don't know anything, my dear, but if you only knew why it all is, why it is that I should love you, then you'd have said something else. You're just saying all this reasonable stuff, but I'm sure that in your heart there's something else entirely.

My dear, I don't even know myself and don't remember very well everything that happened between me and the officers. You should note, my little angel, that before that time I had been in the most dreadful confusion. Imagine that for a whole month already I had, so to speak, been holding on by a single thread. The situation was most calamitous. I was hiding from you, and at home as well, but my landlady made a real song and dance. I didn't mind that. Let the worthless woman shout, but one thing was that it was shameful, and the second was the fact that, the Lord knows how, she'd found out about the bond between us and shouted such things about it for the whole house to hear, that I was dumbstruck and I blocked up my ears too. But the point is that others didn't block up their ears, on the contrary, they pricked them up. Even now, my dear, I don't know what to do with myself...

And so, my little angel, it was all of this, this whole motley collection of various disasters that finally did for me. All of a sudden I hear strange things from Fedora, that an unworthy suitor has come to your house and insulted you with an unworthy proposal; that he's insulted you, deeply insulted you, I judge by myself, my dear, because I too am myself deeply insulted. It was at this point, my little angel, that I went off my head, at this point that I lost control and was completely done for. Varenka, my friend, I ran out in some unheard-of frenzy, and I wanted to go and see him, the sinner; I didn't even know what I wanted to do, because I don't want you, my little angel, to be hurt! Well, I felt sad! And at the time there was rain, and slush, and the anguish was terrible!... I was already on the point of wanting to

return... And it was then that I fell, my dear. I met Yemelya, Yemelyan Ilyich, he's a civil servant, that is, he was a civil servant, but now he's no longer a civil servant, because he was sacked from our office. I don't even know what he does now, he works for his living somehow. Well, so he and I went off together. Then – well what is it to you, Varenka, is it fun or something to read about your friend's misfortunes, his calamities and the story of the temptations he's undergone? On the third day, in the evening – it was Yemelya that put me up to it – I went to see him, the officer. I asked our yardman about the address. If the truth be known, my dear, I'd been keeping an eye on this fine fellow for a long time; I'd trailed him, even when he was still quartered in our house. Now I can see that what I did wasn't proper, because I wasn't myself when I was announced to him. To tell the truth, Varenka, I don't actually remember a thing; I only remember that there were a great many officers with him, or else I was seeing double – God knows. I don't remember what I said either, only I know that I said a lot in my noble indignation. Well it was at that point that I was ejected, at that point that I was thrown down the stairs, that is, it wasn't as if I was completely thrown down, but just, you know, pushed out. You already know, Varenka, how I returned; that's all there is to it. Of course I've let myself down and my pride has suffered, but, I mean, no outsiders know about that, nobody knows except you; well and in that case it's just the same as if it hadn't even happened. Perhaps that's how it is, Varenka, what do you think? The only thing I know for sure is the fact that last year our Aksenty Osipovich made an attack on the person of Pyotr Petrovich in just the same way, but in secret, he did it in secret. He enticed him into the porter's room – I saw it all through a gap in the door – and it was there that he dealt with things as was necessary, but in a noble way, because nobody saw it apart from me; well and I'm all right, that is, I mean to say that I didn't announce it to anyone. Well and since then Aksenty Osipovich and Pyotr Petrovich are all right. Pyotr Petrovich is the proud type, you know, so he didn't tell anyone, and so now they both bow and shake hands. I'm not arguing, Varenka, I don't dare argue with you, I've fallen a long way and, what is more dreadful than anything, I'm a loser in my opinion of myself, but that was probably written in my stars, that's probably my fate – and you can't escape from your fate, you know that yourself. Well and there's a

detailed explanation of my misfortunes and calamities, Varenka, there you have it – it's all the sort of thing you might not want to read, but at the same time... I'm a little unwell, my dear, and I've lost all my playful feelings. For which reason, bearing witness to you of my attachment, love and respect, I now remain, Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear madam,

Your most humble servant

Makar Devushkin

29th July

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

I read both your letters and was left open-mouthed! Listen, my friend, either you're keeping something from me and have written to me of only a part of all your problems, or... truly, Makar Alexeyevich, your letters still have the ring of some sort of distress... Come and see me, for God's sake, come today; and listen, you know what, just come straight to us for dinner. I simply don't know how you're getting on there and how you've come to terms with your landlady. You don't write anything about any of that and it's as if you're keeping something back on purpose. So goodbye, my friend; be sure to visit us today; in fact, you'd do better if you always came to us for dinner, Fedora is a very good cook. Farewell.

Your

Varvara Dobroselova

My dear, Varvara Alexeyevna!

You're pleased, my dear, that God has sent you in your turn the chance to repay kindness with kindness and to show your gratitude to me. I believe this, Varenka, and I believe in the goodness of your angelic heart, and I'm not saying this to you to chide – only don't reproach me like you did that time with having squandered everything in my old age. Well, I was guilty of it, what's to be done, if you really must have me guilty of something; only it costs me a lot to hear such a thing from you, my little friend. But don't you get angry with me for saying this; there's an aching all through my breast, my dear. Poor people are capricious – that's the way nature arranges it. I felt it before, and now I've felt it even more. He, the poor man, he's demanding, he even sees God's world differently and looks askance at every passer-by, and he casts a troubled gaze around him, and he listens carefully to every word, as if wondering "are they saying something about me over there?". Such as "why is he so unattractive? What exactly would he be feeling? How, for example, would he look from this side, how would he look from that side?" And everyone, Varenka, is aware that the poor man is worse than a bit of old rag and can't get any respect from anyone, whatever they might write – them, those scribblers, whatever they might write! Everything about the poor man will be just as it used to be. And why is it that it will be just as it was before? Because the poor man, in their opinion, ought to have everything inside out; he should have nothing at all that's sacred, say, pride of some sort, oh no! Yemelya there was saying the other day that he had a subscription set up for him somewhere, and for every ten-copeck piece he had a sort of official inspection made of him. People thought they were giving him their ten-copeck pieces for nothing – but no, they were paying to be shown a poor man. Nowadays, my dear, even good deeds are done in an odd way somehow... but perhaps they were always done like that, who knows? Either they don't know how to do them, or else they're real experts – one or the other. Perhaps you didn't know this, well, there you are! We're no good at anything else, but we're famous for this! And how does the poor man know all this and think all this sort of stuff? How? Well, from experience! And because he knows, for example, that just nearby there's this gentleman that goes to a restaurant somewhere and

says to himself: "What's that pauper of a clerk going to be eating today? Well I'm going to have sauté papillot, while perhaps he'll be having porridge without any butter." And what business is it of his that I'm going to have porridge without any butter? Such a person can be found, Varenka, he can, that thinks of nothing but such things. And they go around, those indecent satirists, looking to see whether you put the whole of your foot down on a stone or just the toe; then it's "such and such a clerk, from such and such a department, a titular councillor, has his bare toes poking out of his boot, and his elbows have got holes in them" – and then they go and describe it all and such rubbish gets published... And what business is it of yours that my elbows have got holes in them? Well and if you'll forgive me a coarse word, Varenka, then I'll tell you that the poor man feels the same shame on this account as you do, to give an example, maidenly shame. I mean, you wouldn't think of – forgive my coarse word – disrobing in front of everyone, and in exactly the same way the poor man doesn't like people looking into his kennel either and asking "what will his family relations be like?" – there. So why did you have to offend me, Varenka, siding with my enemies in encroaching on the honour and pride of an honest man!

And I was sitting in the office today like such a baby bear-cub, such a plucked sparrow, that I almost burned up in shame for myself. I felt ashamed, Varenka! It's quite natural to be timid when your bare elbows are showing through your clothes and your buttons are dangling on threads. And as if on purpose, I was in such a mess in that respect! Like it or not, your spirits fall. Why, Stepan Karlovich himself began talking about work with me today, he talked and talked, and then as if by chance he added: "Oh, my dear fellow, Makar Alexeyevich!" – but he didn't finish saying what he was thinking, only I'd already guessed it all myself, and I blushed so that even my bald patch turned red. It's nothing really, but all the same it's upsetting, makes you think seriously about things. Has something been found out? God forbid that, well, anything should be found out! I confess I have suspicions, strong suspicions about a certain person. I mean, it's nothing to these villains! They'll betray you! They'll betray the whole of your private life for nothing at all; they hold nothing sacred.

I know now whose game it is: it's Ratazyayev's game. He's acquainted with someone in our department and, you know, in the

course of conversation he probably passed everything on to him with additions; or perhaps he told the story in his own department, and it crept out into our department. And in our apartment everybody knows everything down to the last detail, and people point at your window; I know for sure they point. And when I set off yesterday to have dinner with you, they all leaned out of the windows, and the landlady said “the devil’s taken to cradle-snatching” and then she called you by an indecent name. But all of that’s nothing in the face of Ratazyayev’s vile intention to put you and me in his writing and to describe us in a subtle satire; he said it himself, and good people from our apartment passed it on to me. I simply can’t even think about anything, my dear, and I don’t know what I should decide on. It can’t be denied, we’ve angered the Lord God, my little angel! You wanted to send me some book, my dear, to fend off boredom. Forget it, my dear, the book! What is it, a book? It’s an invented story with characters! A novel is rubbish and it’s written for rubbish, just for idle people to read; believe me, my dear, believe my many years of experience. And what if they go on and on to you about some Shakespeare or other, with “you see, literature has Shakespeare” – well Shakespeare’s rubbish too, it’s all utter rubbish, and it’s all done just to satirize!

Your

Makar Devushkin

2nd August

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

Don't worry about anything; if the Lord God wills it, everything will turn out well. Fedora got a pile of work both for herself and for me, and we set about it most cheerfully; perhaps we'll put everything to rights. She suspects that all my latest problems are not unknown to Anna Fyodorovna, but it's all the same to me now. I'm unusually cheerful somehow today. You want to borrow money – for God's sake, don't! There'll be countless woes later on, when it has to be repaid. Better live more closely with us, come and see us more often and pay no attention to your landlady. And as far as your other enemies and ill-wishers are concerned, I'm sure you're tormenting yourself with futile doubts, Makar Alexeyevich! Watch out now, you know I told you last time that your style was extremely uneven. Well, goodbye, farewell. I expect you to come and see me without fail.

Your

V.D.

My little angel, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I hasten to inform you, oh light of my life, that certain hopes have been born in me. But permit me, my little daughter – you write, my little angel, that I shouldn't take on any loans? My poppet, it's not possible to do without them; things are already bad for me, and, who knows, what if something were to go wrong for you! You're weak, after all; so that's what I'm writing about, the fact that I must definitely borrow. Well, so I continue.

I'll note to you, Varvara Alexeyevna, that in the office I sit next to Yemelyan Ivanovich. That's not the same Yemelyan that you know. This one is a titular councillor, just as I am, and he and I are pretty much the veteran soldiers, the oldest in the whole of our department. He's a kind soul, an unselfish soul, but he's not very talkative and always looks like a real bear. On the other hand he's businesslike, his pen produces a pure English script, and to tell the whole truth, his handwriting is not inferior to mine – a worthy man! We've never been close, but just exchanged the customary goodbyes and hellos; and if at times I've needed a penknife, then I've had occasion to ask him: "Yemelyan Ivanovich, will you give me a penknife?", in short, it's been only what communal life demands. So today he says to me: "Makar Alexeyevich," he says, "why so deep in thought?" I can see that the man wishes me well, so I opened up to him, "It's like this, Yemelyan Ivanovich," that is, I didn't tell him everything, and God forbid that I ever should, because I haven't the heart to tell it, but I did open up to him about some things, told him things were tight and the like. "You should borrow, old chap," says Yemelyan Ivanovich, "you could even borrow from Pyotr Petrovich, he makes loans at a rate of interest; I've borrowed from him; he charges a decent rate, not too onerous." Well, Varenka, my little heart leapt. I keep thinking perhaps the Lord will speak to my benefactor Pyotr Petrovich's heart, and he'll make me a loan. I'm already calculating for myself how I'd go and pay my landlady, and help you, and smarten myself up all round, because otherwise it's so shameful: it's dreadful just sitting in my place, apart from the fact that our scoffers laugh, God forgive them! And his Excellency sometimes passes by our desk; well, God forbid that he should glance at me and notice that I'm improperly dressed! The most important thing for him is being clean and tidy.

Perhaps he wouldn't even say anything, but I'd die of shame – that's the way it would be. As a result of which, pulling myself together and hiding my shame in my ragged pocket, I made for Pyotr Petrovich, both filled with hope and petrified by expectation – all at the same time. Well then, Varenka, you know, it all ended in a nonsense! He was busy with something, speaking with Fedosey Ivanovich. I went up to him from the side and tugged at his sleeve, "Pyotr Petrovich, I say, Pyotr Petrovich!" He glanced around, and I continue: "Well, it's like this, thirty roubles or so," etc. It was as if he didn't understand me at first, but then when I explained everything to him he laughed, and then nothing, he fell silent. I said the same thing to him again. And he says to me – do you have security? And then he buried his nose in his document, writing and not looking at me. I was rather lost for words. No, I say, Pyotr Petrovich, I don't have any security, and I explain to him that "as soon as I get my salary, I'll repay you, repay you without fail, I'll consider it my number-one duty". At that point somebody called for him, I waited for him, he came back and he started sharpening his quill, and doesn't seem to notice me. But I keep on about what I want – "what, Pyotr Petrovich, isn't it possible somehow?" He's silent and it's as if he can't hear, I carry on standing there and I think, well, I'll give it a last try, and I tugged at his sleeve. If only he'd said something, but he finished sharpening his quill and then started to write, and I went away. You see, my dear, they may all very well be worthy people, but they're proud, very proud – and me? We can't compare with them, Varenka! That's why I've written you all this. Yemelyan Ivanovich laughed as well and shook his head, but then the good-hearted fellow did give me hope. Yemelyan Ivanovich is a worthy man. He promised to recommend me to someone; this man, Varenka, lives on the Vyborg Side, he makes loans at a rate of interest too, he's someone in the 14th class.\* Yemelyan Ivanovich says that this one will be quite sure to make me a loan; I'll go tomorrow, my little angel, yes? What do you think? After all, there'll be a calamity if I don't borrow! My landlady is all but driving me out of the apartment and won't agree to let me have dinner. Yes, and my boots are in a dreadfully bad way, my dear, and I haven't got any buttons... well and that's not all I haven't got! Well and what if one of my superiors notices something so unseemly? Calamity, Varenka, calamity, simply calamity!

Makar Devushkin

Dear Makar Alexeyevich!

For God's sake, Makar Alexeyevich, borrow some sum of money just as quickly as you can; I wouldn't have asked you for help in the present circumstances for anything, but if you only knew what my position is! There's no way we can remain in this apartment. The most dreadfully unpleasant things have happened to me, and if you only knew what a state of upset and agitation I'm in now! Imagine, my friend: this morning we're visited by an unknown man of advanced years, almost an old man, wearing his medals. I was surprised, and didn't understand what he wanted of us. Fedora had gone out to the shop at the time. He began questioning me about how I lived and what I did and, without waiting for a reply, he announced to me that he was the uncle of that officer; that he was very angry with his nephew for his bad behaviour and for getting us a bad name throughout the building; he said his nephew was just a little boy and a windbag, and that he was prepared to take me under his wing; he advised me not to listen to young men, added that he commiserated with me like a father, that he had paternal feelings for me and was prepared to help me in everything. I'd turned completely red, didn't even know what to think, but was in no hurry to thank him. He forcibly took hold of my hand, gave my cheek a tweak, said that I was very pretty and that he was extremely pleased with the fact that I had dimples on my cheeks (God knows what he said!), and finally he tried to kiss me, saying that he was already an old man (he was so disgusting!). At that point Fedora came in. He became rather embarrassed and started saying once more that he felt respect for me because of my modesty and moral behaviour and that he very much wished that I wouldn't shun him. Then he called Fedora aside and under some strange pretext tried to give her a sum of money. Naturally, Fedora didn't take it. Finally he got ready to go home, repeated all his assurances once again, said that he would come and see me once again and bring me some earrings (he himself seemed very embarrassed); he advised me to change my apartment and recommended a splendid apartment to me, one he had his eye on and which would cost me nothing; he said he had taken a great liking to me, since I was an honest and sensible girl, he advised me to beware of profligate youths, and finally announced that he knew Anna

Fyodorovna, and that Anna Fyodorovna had instructed him to tell me that she would be visiting me herself. At that point everything became clear. I don't know what came over me; for the first time in my life I was experiencing such a situation; I was beside myself; I absolutely covered him in shame. Fedora helped me and almost drove him from the apartment. We decided that this was all the doing of Anna Fyodorovna: otherwise how could he have known about us?

Now I'm turning to you, Makar Alexeyevich, and begging you for help. For God's sake don't abandon me in such a situation! Please borrow, get hold of at least some sum of money, we have no means to leave the apartment and it's quite impossible to remain here any longer: Fedora's advice is the same. We need at least some twenty-five roubles; I'll repay the money to you; I'll earn it; Fedora will get me some more work in a few days' time, so that if you're deterred by a high rate of interest, pay no attention to that and agree to everything. I'll repay everything to you, only for God's sake don't deprive me of your help. It costs me a lot to trouble you now when you're in such circumstances, but all my hopes are pinned on you alone! Goodbye, Makar Alexeyevich, think of me, and God grant you success!

V.D.

Varvara Alexeyevna, sweetheart!

It's all these unexpected blows that shake me! It's awful misfortunes like this that are killing my spirit! Apart from the fact that this mob of various lickspittles and good-for-nothing old men want to put you in your sickbed, my little angel, apart from all that – they, those lickspittles, they want to destroy me as well. And they will destroy me, I give my word on it, they will! I mean, even now I'm prepared to die sooner than not help you! If I don't help you, then that's already death for me, Varenka, that's already death, pure and simple, but if I do help, then you'll fly away from me, like a little bird from its nest that these owls, these predatory birds are ready to peck to death. That's what's tormenting me, my dear. Yes and you, Varenka, how cruel you are! How could you do it? You're being tormented, hurt, you're suffering, my little fledgling, and still you grieve that you have to trouble me, and, what's more, promise to work off your debt, that is, to tell the truth, you're going to wear yourself out with your poor health so as to come to my aid in time. I mean, Varenka, just you think of what you're saying! Why should you be sewing, why should you be working, tormenting your poor little head with worries, damaging your pretty little eyes and ruining your health? Ah Varenka, Varenka, don't you see, sweetheart, I'm good for nothing, and I know myself that I'm good for nothing, but I'll make myself good for something! I'll overcome everything, I'll find some work on the side for myself, I'll copy out various papers for various men of letters, I'll go and see them, I'll go myself, I'll force them to give me work; because you know, my dear, they look for good scribes, I know they look for them, but I won't let you wear yourself away; I won't let you carry out such a pernicious intention. I shall take a loan without fail, my little angel, and I shall sooner die than not take a loan. And you write, my sweetheart, that I shouldn't take fright at a high rate of interest – and I won't take fright, my dear, I won't take fright, I won't take fright at anything now. I'll ask for forty paper roubles, my dear; after all, that's not a lot, Varenka, what do you think? Can I be trusted with forty roubles from the word go? That is, I mean, do you think me capable of inspiring confidence and trust at first sight? From my face, from the first glance, is it possible to make a favourable judgement about me? You try and remember, little angel, am I capable of

inspiring? What do you for your part suppose? Do you know, I feel such fear – it's morbid, if truth be told, morbid! From the forty roubles I set twenty-five aside for you, Varenka; two silver roubles for the landlady, and the rest is intended for my personal expenditure. You see, the landlady ought to be given a bit more besides, it's even essential, but take the whole matter into consideration, my dear, run through all my needs, then you'll see there's simply no possible way of giving more, consequently there's no point even talking about it, and there's no need even to mention it. I'll buy boots for a silver rouble; I really don't even know now whether I'll be able to appear at work tomorrow in the old ones. A neckerchief would also be essential, for the old one will soon be a year old, but since you promised to cut me not only a kerchief, but also a shirt-front from your old apron, I shan't even think any more about a kerchief. So then, I've got boots and a kerchief. Now buttons, my friend! After all, you must agree, my little mite, that I can't be without buttons; but almost half a coat-breast of them have come off! I tremble at the thought that his Excellency might notice such disorder and say – well what will he say? I won't even hear, my dear, what he'll say, for I'll die, die, die on the spot, really, I'll go and die of shame at the idea alone! Oh, my dear! So then after all the essentials there'll still be three roubles left; so then that will be for expenses and for half a pound of tobacco; because, my little angel, I can't live without tobacco, and it's already nine days now that I've not had my pipe in my mouth. To be honest, I'd have bought it and said nothing to you, but I'd have felt ashamed. There you are with problems, you're deprived of the very last essentials, and I'm here enjoying various pleasures; so that's why I'm telling you all this, so that the pangs of conscience shouldn't torment me. I openly admit to you, Varenka, I'm in an extremely needy state now, that is, absolutely nothing of the kind has ever happened to me before. My landlady despises me, there's no respect at all from anyone; the most awful deficiencies, debts; and at work, where even before I wasn't given an easy time by my fellow clerks – now, my dear, it goes without saying. I hide it, I painstakingly hide everything from everyone, and I hide myself, and when I go in to work, I'm forever sidling, I keep clear of everyone. You know, it's only to you that I have the strength of spirit to confess it... But what if he won't give it to me? Well no, Varenka, better not even think about that and not kill my spirit with such

thoughts in advance. That's why I'm writing this, to put you on your guard, so that you don't think about it yourself and don't torment yourself with a wicked idea. Ah my God, what will happen to you then? It's true that then you won't leave the apartment here, and I'll be with you – but no, I won't even return then, I'll simply vanish somewhere, disappear. Here I am writing away to you, whereas I ought to have a shave, well, it looks a lot better, and a good appearance always finds a way. Well, God grant! I'll say a prayer and be off!

M. Devushkin

Dearest Makar Alexeyevich!

You at least shouldn't despair! There's enough sorrow as it is. I'm sending you thirty silver copecks; I can't possibly manage any more. Buy yourself what you need most to stay alive somehow, at least until tomorrow. We ourselves have almost nothing left, and I just don't know what will happen tomorrow. It's sad, Makar Alexeyevich! But anyway, don't be sad; it didn't work, so what can you do? Fedora says it's not such a bad thing, for the time being we can even stay in this apartment, and even if we'd moved, we'd only have been a little better off, and if they want to, then they'll find us anywhere. Only it's still unpleasant somehow staying here now. If I weren't sad, I'd write you something.

What a strange character you have, Makar Alexeyevich! You take everything much too much to heart; as a result you'll always be the most unhappy man. I read all your letters carefully and can see that in every letter you torment and worry yourself about me as you have never been worried about yourself. Everyone will say, of course, that you have a kind heart, but I say that it's simply too kind. I'm giving you some friendly advice, Makar Alexeyevich. I'm grateful to you, very grateful for all that you've done for me, I feel it all very deeply; so judge, then, how it feels for me to see that even now, after all your misfortunes, of which I was the unwitting cause, even now you only live through what I'm experiencing: through my joys, my sorrows, my heart! If you take everything to do with another person so to heart and if you're so sympathetic about everything, then truly, there is every reason to be the most unhappy man. Today, when you came in to see me after work, I had a fright looking at you. You were so pale, terrified, desperate: you looked awful – and all because you were afraid of telling me about your failure, afraid of distressing me, frightening me, and when you saw that I all but burst out laughing, almost the whole weight was lifted from your heart. Makar Alexeyevich, don't be sad, don't despair, be more reasonable – I beg you, I implore you. Well, you'll see that everything will be fine, everything will change for the better; otherwise your life will be hard, forever in anguish and pain over someone else's sorrow. Goodbye, my friend; I implore you, don't worry too much about me.

V.D.

Sweetheart, Varenka!

Well all right, my little angel, all right! You've decided it's not such a bad thing that I didn't get any money. Well all right, I'm calm, I'm happy on your account. I'm even glad you're not abandoning me, an old man, and will stay in the apartment here. And if I'm telling the whole truth, then my heart was all overflowing with joy when I saw that you'd written so nicely about me in your little letter and given due praise to my feelings. I say this not out of pride, but because I can see how you love me if you worry so about my heart. Well all right; what's the point of talking about my heart now? The heart looks after itself; but you instruct me, my dear, not to be faint-hearted. Yes, my little angel, perhaps I'll say myself that it's not needed, that faint-heartedness; but for all that, my dear, decide for yourself what boots I'll go to work in tomorrow! That's the thing, my dear, and after all, a thought like that can destroy a man, completely destroy him. But the main thing is, my dear, it's not for myself I grieve, not for myself I suffer; it's all the same to me, even going around in a hard frost without a greatcoat and without boots, I'll suffer and endure it all, I'm all right; I'm a simple, small man – but what will people say? My enemies, all those wicked tongues, what will they start saying when you set off without a greatcoat? I mean, it's for other people you go around in a greatcoat, and I suppose you wear boots for them too. In that case, my dear, my little sweetheart, I need boots to uphold my honour and my good name; whereas in boots full of holes both the one and the other are lost – believe me, my dear, believe my many years of experience; listen to me, an old man who knows the world and people, and not to any old daubers and scribblers.

But I still haven't even told you in detail, my dear, how it all actually was today, what I had to go through today. What I went through, the amount of spiritual pressure I endured in one morning, was what another man wouldn't endure even in an entire year. This is the way it was: I set out, firstly, ever so early, so as both to catch him and be in time for work. There was such rain, there was such slush today! I huddled inside my greatcoat, my little flower, and I'm walking and walking and thinking all the time: "Lord, forgive me my trespasses and send the fulfilment of my desires." I went past the \*\*\* church, crossed myself, repented of all my sins and remembered that I

wasn't worthy to come to arrangements with the Lord God. I sank into myself and didn't want to look at anything, and so I went on without looking where I was going. The streets were empty, and everyone I did meet was so busy, so careworn, and no wonder: who'd go out for a walk at such an early hour and in such weather! I ran into an artel of dirty workmen; they jostled me, the ruffians! I came over timid, I was beginning to feel dreadful, to tell the truth I didn't even want to think about the money – let it be just on the off-chance! Right by the Voskresensky Bridge my sole came off, so I just don't know myself what I walked on then. And at that point I ran into our assistant clerk Yermolayev, he pulled himself erect and stands there, following me with his eyes as if asking for a tip; ah my dear fellow, I thought, a tip, how could I give you a tip! I got awfully tired, stopped for a moment and had a bit of a rest, and then dragged myself on again. I gazed around deliberately to find something to fix my thoughts on, to distract me, to cheer me up: not a chance – I couldn't fix a single thought on anything, and in addition I'd got so filthy that I began to feel ashamed of myself. Finally in the distance I caught sight of a wooden house, yellow and with an attic storey like a belvedere – right, well, I think, that's it, that's like Yemelyan Ivanovich said – Markov's house. (It's this Markov, my dear, that lends money at a rate of interest.) I was quite beside myself now, and I mean, I knew it was Markov's house, but still I asked the duty policeman, "Whose is that house, mate?" The policeman's so rude, speaks unwillingly as if he's angry with someone, mutters his words through clenched teeth – that, he says, that's Markov's house. These policemen are all so insensitive – but why worry about a policeman? But somehow it was all bad and unpleasant impressions, in short, it was all one thing leading to another; from everything you can draw something similar to your own situation, and it's always like that. I walked up and down the street past the house three times, and the more I walk, the worse it gets – no, I think, he won't give me it, he won't give me it for anything! I'm a stranger, mine is a delicate matter, and I don't cut a very good figure – well, I think, as Fate decides; so as not to regret anything later on, after all, I won't get my head bitten off for trying – and I quietly opened the gate. And at that point another misfortune: a stupid, nasty little yard dog started pestering me; it's barking itself out of its skin! And it's rotten, trivial things like that that always infuriate a person,

my dear, and make him come over timid, and destroy all the decisiveness that he'd thought about in advance; so I went into the house petrified, went in and straight into another misfortune – I failed to make out what was on the ground in the murk by the doorstep, took a step and stumbled over some woman, and the woman was decanting milk from a milk pail into jugs and she spilt all the milk. And the stupid woman began shrieking and jabbering – “and where do you think you’re going, sir, what do you want?” and then she started moaning, something about the Devil. I’m remarking on this, my dear, because in matters of a similar kind something of the sort has always happened to me; you know, it must just be my fate; I’m forever getting sidetracked by something. The mistress, an old witch of a Finn, poked her head out at the noise and I turned directly to her – “does Markov live here?” No, she says; she stood a minute, having a good look at me. “And what do you want with him?” I explain to her that it’s like this, Yemelyan Ivanovich – well and all the rest of it – I’ve got a little business, I say. The old woman called her daughter, and her daughter came out too, no youngster, bare-footed – “call your father; he’s upstairs with the lodgers – come in, please.” I went in. Not a bad room, pictures hanging on the walls, all portraits of some generals or other, there’s a sofa, a round table, mignonette, balsam – and I keep on thinking, “that’s enough, shouldn’t I clear off while the going’s good, should I go or not?” And you know, my dear, I really did want to run away! Better, I’m thinking, if I come tomorrow; the weather will be better, and I can wait – whereas today there’s the milk that’s been spilt, and the generals are looking so cross... I was already heading for the door, but in he came – nothing special, grey-haired, furtive little eyes, in a dirty dressing gown tied with a rope. He enquired why and how, and I said “it’s like this: Yemelyan Ivanovich – forty roubles or so”, I say; “that sort of thing” – but I didn’t finish. I could see by his eyes that it was a lost cause. “No,” he says, “what business is this, I’ve got no money; what then, have you some security or something?” I began to try and explain “I’ve no security, but Yemelyan Ivanovich” – in short, I explain what’s necessary. After listening to it all, “no,” he says, “what about Yemelyan Ivanovich! I’ve got no money.” Well, I think, so be it then; I knew it all, I foresaw it – well, Varenka, it would simply have been better if the ground had opened up beneath me; this cold feeling, my legs numb, gooseflesh up

and down my back. I'm looking at him, and he's looking at me and all but saying "well, be on your way, my man, there's nothing for you here" – so that if something of the kind happened another time, I'd be utterly shamefaced. Well what do you want, what do you need the money for? (That's what he asked about, you see, my dear!) I tried to open my mouth, just so as not to stand there to no purpose, but he didn't begin to listen to me – no, he says, I've got no money; it would be my pleasure, he says. I kept on presenting it to him, I'm saying I only want a little, after all, I'll pay it back, I say, I'll pay it back on time, I'll pay it back even before it's due, he could ask any rate of interest he liked and I swear to God I'll pay it back. At that moment I remembered you, my dear, I remembered all your misfortunes and needs, I remembered your fifty copecks – no, he says, the rate of interest's nothing to do with it, but if there were security, now! Because I've got no money, I swear to God I haven't; it would be my pleasure, he says – he even swore, the scoundrel!

Well, at that point, my dear, I don't even recall how I left, how I crossed the Vyborg Side, how I got to Voskresensky Bridge, I was dreadfully tired, I was frozen stiff, chilled to the marrow, and I only managed to arrive at work at ten o'clock. I wanted to clean myself up a bit, get rid of the dirt, but Snegirev, the porter, said I couldn't, "you'll ruin the brush," he says, "and the brush, sir, belongs to the department." That's the way they are now, my dear, so for these gentlemen too I'm little better than a bit of rag you wipe your feet on. I mean, what is it that's killing me, Varenka? It's not the money that's killing me, but all these little alarms of life, all these whispers, little smiles, little jokes. His Excellency might unexpectedly have something to say on my account sometime – oh, my dear, my golden age is over! I've reread all your letters today; I feel sad, my dear! Goodbye, my dear, may the Lord preserve you!

M. Devushkin

PS: I wanted to describe my sorrow to you, Varenka, with a bit of funny stuff mixed in, only I evidently can't manage it, the funny stuff. I wanted to please you. I'll come and see you, my dear, I'll be sure to come, I'll come tomorrow.

11th August

Varvara Alexeyevna! My sweetheart, my dear! I'm ruined, we're both ruined, we're both of us irrevocably ruined together. My reputation, pride – all is lost! I am destroyed and you are destroyed, my dear, you too are irrevocably destroyed along with me! It is I, I that have led you to destruction! I am persecuted, my dear, despised, held up to mockery, and my landlady has simply begun abusing me; she shouted and shouted at me today, gave me such a roasting, set me lower than a splinter. And at Ratazyayev's in the evening one of them began reading out loud the draft of a letter that I wrote to you but accidentally let drop out of my pocket. Oh madam, how they jeered! They called out our names, called them out and they roared and roared with laughter, the traitors! I went in to them and accused Ratazyayev of treachery; I told him he was a traitor! And Ratazyayev replied that I was a traitor myself, that I was busy with various conquests; "you were hiding yourself from us," he says, "you're a Lovelace,"\* and now they all call me Lovelace, and I don't have any other name! Do you hear, my little angel, do you hear – now they know everything, they're familiar with everything, and they know about you, my dear, and everything there is to know about you, they know about everything! And that's nothing! Faldoni's the same, he's in it with them as well; I sent him to the sausage shop to get something today; he simply won't go, he says he's got something to do! "But it's your duty to go," I say. "No, it's not," he says, "it's not my duty, you don't pay my mistress any money, so I don't have any duty towards you." I wasn't going to take an insult from him, from an uneducated peasant, and I called him a fool; and he says to me – "it takes one to know one." I thought he must have been drinking to say something so rude to me – and so I say to him, "you're drunk, you peasant, you!" And he says to me: "And it was you that treated me, was it? Have you got the money for the hair of the dog yourself? You have to beg ten copecks at a time off some woman," – and then added: "Huh! And still think you can give orders!" There, my dear, that's what things have come to! I'm ashamed to be alive, Varenka! I'm like a man possessed; worse than some tramp without a passport. Grave calamities! I'm lost, simply lost! Irrevocably lost.

M.D.

13th August

Dearest Makar Alexeyevich! It's just trouble after trouble coming down on us, I just don't even know myself what to do! What will happen to you now, and I can't be relied on; I burned my left hand today with the iron; I accidentally dropped it, and banged and burned my hand all at the same time. There's no way I can work, and Fedora has been sick for three days now. I'm in agonies with worry. I'm sending you thirty silver copecks; that's almost all we have left, but God knows how I should like to help you now with your needs. It's upsetting to the point of tears! Goodbye, my friend! It would be a great consolation to me if you were to visit us today.

V.D.

14th August

Makar Alexeyevich! What is the matter with you? You must have lost the fear of God! You're simply driving me mad. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You're ruining yourself, just think of your reputation! You're an honourable, noble, proud man – but when everyone finds out about you! You'll simply have to die of shame! Or do you feel no pity for your grey hairs? Well, do you fear God? Fedora said she'd no longer help you now, and I won't be giving you any money either. What have you brought me to, Makar Alexeyevich! You probably think it's nothing to me that you behave so badly; you don't know yet what I endure because of you! I can't even go up and down our staircase: everybody looks at me, they point their fingers at me and say such terrible things; yes, they say bluntly that *I'm mixed up with a drunkard*. How do I feel hearing that! When they bring you back, all the tenants point you out with contempt: there, they say, they've brought back that civil servant. And I just can't say how ashamed I feel for you. I swear to you that I shall move away from here. I'll go and work as a maid somewhere, as a laundrywoman, but I won't stay here. I wrote and asked you to call on me, but you didn't. Evidently my tears and requests are nothing to you, Makar Alexeyevich! And where did you get the money from? For God's sake, look after yourself. You'll be ruined, you know, you'll be ruined for nothing! And what shame and dishonour! Your landlady didn't even want to let you in yesterday, you spent the night just inside the porch: I know everything. If you only knew how hard it was for me when I found it all out. Come and visit me, you'll have a nice time here: we'll read together, we'll reminisce about the old days. Fedora will tell us about her wanderings as a pilgrim. For my sake, my dear, don't ruin yourself and don't ruin me. It's just for you alone, you know, that I live, for your sake that I stay with you. And now you're like this! Be a noble man, firm in misfortune; remember that poverty is no sin. Yes and why despair? This is all temporary! God willing, everything will come right, only you stand firm now. I'm sending you twenty copecks, buy yourself some tobacco or whatever you like, only for God's sake don't spend it on anything bad. Come and visit us, be sure to come. Perhaps you'll be ashamed like before, but don't you be ashamed, it's false shame. If only you'd bring true repentance. Trust in God. He will arrange everything for the best.

V.D.

19th August

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear!

I'm ashamed, my little flower, Varvara Alexeyevna, I'm utterly shamefaced. But then what's so out of the ordinary in that, my dear? Why shouldn't you bring a little cheer to your heart? I don't even think about my soles then, because a sole is nonsense and will always remain a simple, dirty, rotten sole. And boots are nonsense too! And the Greek sages went about without boots, so why should the likes of us make a fuss over such an unworthy object? So in that case why should people offend me, why should they despise me? Ah, my dear, my dear, you found what to write! And tell Fedora that she's a cantankerous, troublesome, hot-headed woman, and in addition she's stupid, inexpressibly stupid! And as far as my greyness is concerned, you're wrong about that too, my dear, because I'm not such an old man as you think at all. Yemelya sends his regards. You write that you grieved and cried, and I write to you that I grieved and cried as well. In conclusion I wish you all good health and prosperity, and as far as I'm concerned, I'm also in good health and prosperous, and remain, my little angel, your friend

Makar Devushkin

Madam and dear friend, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I feel that I'm at fault, I feel that I've wronged you, and in my opinion there's nothing to be gained at all, my dear, from the fact that I feel all this, no matter what you say. Even before my misdemeanour I felt it all, but now my spirits have fallen, with the consciousness of guilt they've fallen. My dear, I'm not wicked and I'm not hard-hearted, but to torment your little heart, my poppet, I'd need to be neither more nor less than a bloodthirsty tiger, why and I've got the heart of a lamb and, as you too are aware, I don't have any urge towards bloodthirstiness; consequently, my little angel, neither am I totally to blame for my misdemeanour, just as neither my heart, nor my thoughts are to blame either; and so I don't even know what is to blame. It's such a murky business, my dear! You sent me thirty silver copecks, and then you sent me twenty copecks, and my heart began to ache, looking at your orphan's money. You yourself have burnt your hand, you'll soon be starving, but you write that I should buy some tobacco. Well, how was I to act in such an instance? Was I without a twinge of conscience, like a brigand, to start robbing you, a little orphan? It was at that point that my spirits fell, my dear, that is, at first, feeling, like it or not, that I was good for nothing and that I was myself perhaps only a little better than my sole, I thought it unseemly to take myself for something meaningful, rather on the contrary, I began to think myself something unseemly and to a certain extent indecent. Well and when I lost respect for myself, when I allowed myself to deny my good qualities and my worth, then at that point everything went to ruin, at that point came the fall! It's fated to be this way now, and I'm not to blame for it. At first I went out for a bit of fresh air. And at that point it all happened, one thing on top of another: nature was so tearful, and the weather cold, and the rain, well and at that point Yemelya happened by. Varenka, he'd already pawned everything he had, everything that belonged to him had gone where it had to, and when I met him, he'd not had a bite to eat for two days already, and so now he wanted to pawn such things as you can't even possibly pawn, because things like that just aren't security. Well then, Varenka, I gave way more out of compassion for mankind than following my own bent. So that's how this sin came about, my dear! How he and I cried together! We talked about you. He's the

kindest, he's a very kind man, and an extremely sensitive man. I feel it all myself, my dear; the reason all this sort of thing happens to me is that I feel it all a lot. I know, sweetheart of mine, how indebted I am to you! When I came to know you, I began firstly to know myself better as well, and I began to love you; whereas before you, my little angel, I was lonely, and it was as if I was asleep, and not alive in the world. They, my antagonists, said that even my figure was unseemly, and they found me repulsive, well and I began to find myself repulsive; they said I was dim, and I really did think I was dim, but when you appeared to me, you lit up the whole of my dark life, so that both my heart and my soul were lit up, and I acquired spiritual peace and found out that I too am no worse than anyone else; it's just that I don't shine in any way, I've got no polish, no tone, but nevertheless I am a man, in my heart and my thoughts I am a man. Well but now, feeling that I'm persecuted by Fate, that, humiliated by it, I've allowed myself to deny my own worth, and depressed by my calamities, I've let my spirits fall. And since you now know everything, my dear, I humbly beg you not to show any more curiosity on this subject, for my heart is breaking and it's bitter and painful.

I assure you, my dear, of my esteem and remain your faithful  
Makar Devushkin

I didn't finish the last letter, Makar Alexeyevich, because it was hard for me to write. Sometimes I have these minutes when I'm glad to be alone, to be sad alone, to pine alone, without sharing it, and such minutes are beginning to come upon me more and more frequently. There is something in my memories so inexplicable for me, that carries me away so uncontrollably, so powerfully, that for several hours at a time I can be senseless to all my surroundings, and I forget everything, everything in the present. And there is no impression in my present life, be it pleasant, difficult or sad, that cannot remind me of something similar in my past, and more often than not of my childhood, my golden childhood! But things always become hard for me after such moments. I become weak somehow, my dreaminess exhausts me, and my health is in any case becoming worse and worse.

But today the fresh, bright, brilliant morning, the likes of which are rare here in autumn, enlivened me, and I greeted it joyfully. And so it's autumn for us already! How I loved the autumn in the countryside! I was still a child, but even then I already felt a lot. I loved the autumn evening more than the morning. I remember, a stone's throw from our house was a lake at the bottom of a hill. This lake – it's as if I can see it now – this lake was so broad and bright and pure, like crystal! Sometimes, if the evening was still, the lake was calm; nothing would stir on the trees that grew along the bank, the water was motionless as if it were a mirror. It's fresh and cold! The dew falls on the grass, little lights appear in the huts on the shore, the herd is driven home – and now I slip quietly out of the house to look at my lake, and sometimes I'd forget everything as I looked. The fishermen have some bundle of brushwood burning right beside the water, and the light pours a long, long way across the water. The sky is so cold and blue, and around the edges it's all streaked with fiery red bands, and those bands become paler and paler; the moon comes out; the air is so resonant, that if a frightened little bird takes off, or the reeds start rustling in the light breeze, or a fish splashes in the water – everything would be audible. White steam rises across the blue water, delicate, transparent. The distance darkens; everything is somehow drowning in the mist, while nearby everything is so sharply defined, as if cut with a chisel – a boat, the shore, the islands; some barrel, discarded, forgotten right by the shore, bobs a little on the

water, a willow branch with yellowed leaves gets tangled in the reeds – a belated seagull flies up, then plunges into the cold water, then again flies up and sinks into the mist. I would forget everything, looking and listening – I was wonderfully happy! But I was still a child, a baby!...

I was so fond of the autumn – late autumn, when the grain has already been harvested, all the work finished, when the young peasants have already started gathering in their huts in the evenings, when everybody is already waiting for winter. Then everything becomes gloomier, the sky frowns with clouds, the yellow leaves settle like pathways around the edges of the bare wood, while the wood turns blue or black – especially in the evening, when a damp mist descends and the trees can be glimpsed through the mist like giants, like ugly, frightening ghosts. Sometimes you might be out late walking, you'd fall behind the others, you'd be walking by yourself, hurrying – it was horrible! You tremble like a leaf; any minute, you think, someone frightening will peer out of the hollow in that tree trunk; meanwhile the wind rushes through the wood, drones, roars and howls so mournfully, rips a cloud of leaves from the sorry branches, spins them around in the air, and beyond them birds rush by in a long, far-flung noisy flock, with wild piercing cries, so that the sky turns black and all is covered by them. You become frightened, and at that point – it's exactly as if you can hear someone – there's somebody's voice, it's as if somebody is whispering: "Run, run, child, don't be late; it'll be frightening here any minute, run, child!" Horror passes through your heart and you run and run until you're out of breath. You run home panting; the house is noisy and cheerful; all us children are given work: shelling peas or poppy seeds. Damp firewood crackles in the stove; mother watches cheerfully over our cheerful work. My old nanny Ulyana tells stories about the old days or frightening fairy tales about wizards and dead men. We children squeeze together, girl to girl, but we all have a smile on our lips. Then suddenly we fall silent all at once... hark! A noise! As if somebody's knocking! It was never anything; it's old Frolovna's spinning wheel droning; how much laughter there was! And later on we can't sleep in the night from fear; we have such frightening dreams. Sometimes you'd wake up not daring to stir and you'd be frozen under the blanket until dawn. In the morning you'd get up as fresh as a daisy.

You look out of the window: the whole field is covered in frost; a delicate autumnal rime hangs on the denuded boughs; the lake has a paper-thin covering of ice; white steam is rising across the lake; cheerful birds cry out. The bright rays of the sun shine all around and break up the thin ice like glass. It's light, bright and cheerful! The fire crackles in the stove once more; we all sit down close to the samovar, while our black dog, Polkan, frozen through after the night, looks in through the windows and wags his tail amicably. A little peasant will ride past the windows on a jaunty little horse on his way to the wood for kindling. Everyone is so contented, so cheerful!... Ah, what a golden childhood I had!...

Now I've started crying like a baby, carried away by my memories. I called everything to mind so vividly, so vividly, the past as a whole stood before me so brightly, while the present is so dull, so dark!... How will it end, how will it all end? Do you know, I have a sort of conviction, a sort of certainty that I'm going to die this autumn. I'm very, very sick. I often think about my dying, but still I'd rather not die like this – and lie in the earth here. Perhaps I'll take to my bed again like I did then too, in the spring, but I've still not managed to recover. Even now I feel really bad. Fedora's gone out somewhere for the whole day today, and I'm sitting here alone. And for some time now I've been afraid of being left by myself; it constantly seems as if there's someone else in the room with me, as if someone's talking to me; especially when I fall to thinking about something, then suddenly come to from my reverie, so that I start to feel afraid. That's why I've written you such a long letter; when I'm writing it passes. Goodbye: I'm ending the letter because I've got neither paper nor time. Of the money I got for my clothes and hat I have only one silver rouble left. You gave your landlady two silver roubles; that's very good; she'll keep quiet for a while now.

Do something about your clothes somehow. Goodbye; I'm so tired; I don't understand why I'm becoming so weak; the slightest activity tires me. If some work turns up, how am I to do it? That's what's killing me.

V.D.

Varenka, my poppet!

Today, my little angel, I have experienced a lot of impressions. Firstly, my head ached all day. So as to revive myself somewhat, I went out to take a walk along the Fontanka. The evening was so dark and damp. Before six o'clock it's already getting dark – that's the way it is now! It wasn't raining, but on the other hand there was a mist as heavy as a good drop of rain. Storm clouds were crossing the sky in long, broad streaks. There were masses of people walking along the embankment, and as if deliberately, the people had such ugly, depressing faces, drunken men, snub-nosed Finnish women with bare heads and wearing boots, artisans, cab drivers, the likes of me going about some business or other; little boys, some apprentice locksmith in a striped smock, hollow-cheeked and sickly, with a face bathed in smoked oil and with a lock in his hand; an ex-soldier, seven feet tall – that's what the people were like. It was evidently the sort of hour when no other people could have been there. It's like a shipping canal, the Fontanka! There's such a mass of barges, you can't work out where it could all fit in. On the bridges sit women with damp gingerbread and rotten apples, and they're all such dirty, damp women. It's miserable taking a walk along the Fontanka! Wet granite beneath your feet, at your sides – tall, dark, sooty buildings; beneath your feet the mist, above your head the mist as well. It was such a sad, such a dark evening today.

When I turned into Gorokhovaya Street, it was already completely dark and they'd started lighting the gas lamps. I haven't been on Gorokhovaya in quite a long time – I haven't had the chance. It's a noisy street! What rich stalls and shops; everything simply shines and burns, material, flowers under glass, various hats with ribbons. You might think it's all just laid out to look pretty – but no; after all, there are people who buy all these things and give them to their wives. It's a rich street! There are an awful lot of German bakers living on Gorokhovaya; they must be extremely well-off people too. How many carriages go by every minute; how does the roadway bear it all? Such smart coaches, windows like mirrors, inside – velvet and silk, noblemen's footmen wearing epaulettes and carrying swords. I looked into all the carriages, ladies sitting in all of them, so dressed-up, perhaps even princesses and countesses. It was probably the sort of hour when everyone was hurrying to balls and gatherings. It's curious

seeing a princess and any grand lady generally close to; it must be very nice; I've never seen one; except like then, when you look into a carriage. At that point I thought of you. Ah my poppet, my dear! When I think of you now, my whole heart aches! Why are you so unfortunate, Varenka? My little angel, what makes you worse than all of them? You're good, beautiful, educated; why then does such an evil fate befall your lot? Why does everything happen in such a way that a good person is in desolation, while happiness comes of its own accord to somebody else? I know, my dear, I know that it's wrong to think like this, that it's free thinking, but in sincerity, to tell the whole truth, why has the crow of Fate croaked out a promise of happiness for one while he's still in his mother's womb, while another comes out into the world from the orphanage? And you know, it often happens that Ivan the Fool\* is the one that gets happiness. "Ivan the Fool, you rummage in your grandfather's sacks, drink, eat, have fun, whereas you, you so-and-so, you just lick your lips; that's all you're good for, that's the way you are, brother." It's a sin, my dear, it's a sin to think like this, but sin creeps into your heart here somehow, like it or not. You too should ride in a carriage like that, my dear, my little flower. Generals would try to catch your gracious glance – not the likes of me; you'd go around not in a worn gingham dress, but in silk and gold. You wouldn't be thin and sickly like now, but like a sugar figure, fresh, rosy and plump. And then I'd be made happy just by the fact that I could at least glimpse you in brightly lit windows from the street, I could at least see your shadow; just at the thought that you were happy and cheerful there, my pretty little bird, I'd cheer up too. But now what? As if it wasn't enough that wicked people have ruined you, some scum, some libertine is offending you. With his tailcoat sitting smartly on him, looking at you shamelessly through a gold lorgnette, well, he gets away with everything, you even have to listen indulgently to his indecent talk! That's enough, isn't it, my dears? And why is all this so? It's because you're an orphan, because you're defenceless, because you have no powerful friend to give you decent support. But I mean, what sort of person is it, what sort of people are they for whom it's nothing to insult an orphan? They're some sort of scum and not people, simply scum; they're nothing, they just make up numbers, but they're not really there, and of that I'm sure. That's how they are, those people! But in my opinion, my dear, that organ-grinder

I met today on Gorokhovaya is more likely to inspire esteem than they are. He may go wandering around the whole day, waiting for some small change that's been lying idle, no use to anyone, to spend on food, but on the other hand he's his own master, he feeds himself. He doesn't want to beg for alms; but then he toils for people's pleasure, like a clockwork machine – "there, I'll bring pleasure as best I can." A beggar, he's a beggar, it's true, just the same beggar; but then he's a noble beggar; he's tired, he's frozen stiff, but still he toils, in his own way maybe, but nevertheless he toils. And there are many honest people, my dear, who earn perhaps just a little according to the measure and usefulness of their toil, but who bow to nobody and beg bread of no one. And I too, in exactly the same way as that organ-grinder, that is, not in the same way, not at all like him, yet in my own sense, in a noble, in a gentlemanly respect, in exactly the same way as he does, I toil as my strength allows, as best I can, so to speak. I can give no more, and what can't be cured must be endured.

The reason why I started talking about that organ-grinder, my dear, is that I happened to feel my poverty doubly today. I stopped to look at the organ-grinder. Such ideas were coming into my head – so I stopped to take my mind off things. I'm standing there, and there are cab drivers, some young woman, and a little girl as well, who's all dirty. The organ-grinder set himself up in front of somebody's windows. I notice a little one, a boy, around ten or so; he would have been a nice little thing, but to look at he's ill, sickly, wearing not much more than just a little shirt, all but bare-footed he's standing, mouth wide open, listening to the music – childhood! He was so intent on watching the German's dolls dancing, while his own hands and feet were frozen, he's shivering and chewing the end of his sleeve. I notice he's got some little bit of paper in his hands. Some gentleman passed and threw the organ-grinder a small coin; the coin landed right in the railed-off compartment where a Frenchman's shown dancing with some ladies. No sooner had the coin jingled than this boy of mine roused himself, looked timidly around, and evidently thought it was me that had given the money. He ran up to me, his little hands are trembling, his little voice is trembling, he reached out the bit of paper to me and says: "a note!" I unfolded the note – well what of it, it's nothing new, it's: "my benefactors, the children's mother is dying, her three children are starving, so you help us now, then when I die, in

return for your not forgetting my fledglings now, I won't forget you, my benefactors, in the other world." Well what have we here; the matter's clear, it's an everyday matter, but what am I to give them? Well and I didn't give him anything. But how sorry I felt! A poor little boy, blue from the cold, perhaps hungry too, and he's not lying, I swear it, he's not lying; I know this business. But the only thing that's wrong is, why do these rotten mothers not look after their children, but send them out half-naked into such cold with notes? Perhaps she's a stupid woman, a weak character, and perhaps there's nobody to make the effort for her, and so she sits with her legs crossed, and perhaps she really is sick. Well, she should still go to the right place for help, but then perhaps she's simply a rogue who sends a hungry, sickly child out on purpose to deceive people, who makes him ill. And what will the poor boy learn with those notes? His heart only hardens; he goes running around, begging. People pass, but they've no time for him. Their hearts are made of stone; their words are cruel. "Get away! Clear off! You're messing about!" That's what he hears from everyone, and the child's heart hardens, and a poor little browbeaten boy shivers in the cold like a fledgling that's fallen out of a broken nest. His hands and feet are cold; it takes his breath away. A little while, and there he is already coughing; not long to wait now, and the sickness will creep into his chest like a snake, and then, before you know it, death is already standing over him, somewhere in a stinking corner, without care, without attention – and there you have the whole of his life! That's the way life can be! Oh, Varenka, it's torture to hear "for the love of God" and to pass by and not give anything, and to say to him "God will give to you." Another "for the love of God" is nothing in comparison. (Even the words "for the love of God" can be different, my dear.) One is long, drawn-out, habitual, memorized, quite beggarly; it's not such a torture not to give to that one, that's a long-term beggar who's been doing it for ages, a beggar by trade, that one is used to it, you think, he'll survive and knows how to survive. Yet another "for the love of God" is unaccustomed, crude, dreadful – just like today, when I was about to take the boy's note, there was someone standing right there by the fence, and he wasn't asking everyone, he says to me: "Give me a coin, sir, for the love of God!" – and in such an abrupt, crude voice that some dreadful feeling made me shudder, but I didn't give him a coin: I didn't have one. And rich

people don't like it either when poor men complain aloud about their hard lot – “they're a nuisance,” they say, “they're importunate” – and poverty is always importunate: do their hungry groans stop them sleeping, or something?

To tell the truth, my dear, I began describing all this to you in part to get it off my chest, but more to show you an example of the good style of my writing. Because you'll probably acknowledge yourself, my dear, that recently my style has been taking shape. But now such anguish has come upon me that I've myself begun to sympathize to the depths of my soul with my ideas, and although I know myself, my dear, that this sympathy will get you nowhere, nevertheless in a certain way you'll do yourself justice. And honestly, my dear, you often destroy yourself without any reason, you don't value yourself at all and you grade yourself lower than a splinter. And if I express myself with a comparison, then perhaps it occurs because of the fact that I'm myself browbeaten and hounded, just like that poor little boy who asked me for charity. Now I'm going to talk to you, as an example, allegorically, my dear; just listen to me; there are occasions, my dear, early in the morning, hurrying to work, when I can't take my eyes off the city, the way it wakes up, rises, smokes, boils, clatters – and then sometimes you feel so small in the face of such a sight, that it's as if your inquisitive nose had been given a sort of tweak by somebody, and so you trudge on your way as quiet as a mouse and give it up as a bad job! Now look closely at what's going on in those big, black, sooty, solid buildings, go into it carefully, and then judge for yourself whether it was fair to grade yourself senselessly and enter into unworthy confusion. Note, Varenka, that I'm talking allegorically, not in a literal sense. Well, shall we see what's inside those buildings? There in some smoky corner, in some damp kennel, which, out of necessity, is thought of as an apartment, some workman has woken up from sleep, and all night, to give an example, he's been dreaming in his sleep of the boots that he'd accidentally got a hole in the day before, as if it were precisely such rubbish that a man ought to dream of! But then after all he's a workman, he's a cobbler: he can be forgiven for keeping on thinking about his own one subject. He's got his children whining and a hungry wife, and it's not only cobblers that get up like that sometimes, my dear. And that would be all right, and it wouldn't be worth writing about it, but here's the thing that

emerges at this point, my dear: right here, in this same building, one floor above or below, in gilt chambers, those same boots, perhaps, were also dreamt of in the night by the richest of persons, that is, a different manner of boots, of a different design, but boots all the same, for in the sense I'm implying here, my dear, we all, my dear, turn out to be cobblers a little bit. And that would all be all right, but the only bad thing is that there's nobody alongside this richest of persons, no man who could whisper in his ear something like: "that's enough thinking of things like that, thinking only of yourself, living only for yourself, you're not a cobbler, your children are healthy and your wife isn't asking for something to eat; look around, can't you see a more noble object for your concern than your boots?" That's what I wanted to say to you allegorically, Varenka. Perhaps it's too free a thought, my dear, but sometimes I have this thought, sometimes it comes, and then, like it or not, it breaks out of my heart as a burning word. And that's why there was no reason to value myself at next to nothing because I was frightened just by noise and thunder! I'll conclude then, my dear, with the suggestion that you might perhaps think I'm talking slander to you, or it's just that I'm feeling depressed, or I've copied this out from some book? No, my dear, don't you believe it – it's not so: I abhor slander, I'm not depressed and I've not copied anything out from any book – so there!

I arrived home in a sad frame of mind, sat down by the table, heated up my kettle and prepared to drink a glass or two of tea. Suddenly I see Gorshkov, our poor lodger, coming in to visit me. I'd noticed in the morning that he kept on darting in and out among the tenants for some reason and that he wanted to approach me. And in passing I'll say, my dear, that their existence is incomparably worse than mine. Much worse! A wife, children! So that if I were Gorshkov, I just don't know what I'd do in his place! Well, so my Gorshkov came in, he bows, there's a little tear, as always, hanging on his lashes like puss, he shuffles his feet but can't get a word out of himself. I sat him down on a chair, on a broken one, it's true, but there wasn't any other. I offered him some tea. He made excuses, made excuses for a long time, however, he finally took a glass. He was going to drink it without sugar, again began making excuses when I started assuring him that he must take some sugar, he argued for a long time, refusing, finally put the smallest little piece in his glass and started assuring me

that the tea was uncommonly sweet. Ah, to what degradation does poverty bring people! "Well then, what's up, old fellow?" I said to him. "Well it's like this," he says, "Makar Alexeyevich, my benefactor, show God's charity, lend assistance to an unfortunate family; the wife and children, nothing to eat; what do you think that's like," he says, "for me, a father!" I tried to say something, but he interrupted me: "I'm afraid of everyone here, Makar Alexeyevich," he says, "that is, it's not that I'm afraid of them, but just, you know, I'm ashamed; they're all proud and arrogant. I wouldn't even think of troubling you," he says, "my good fellow and benefactor: I know you've had some problems yourself, I know you can't give a lot either, but give me at least something on loan; and the reason why," he says, "I dared to ask you, was that I know your kind heart, I know you've been in need yourself, that even now you're experiencing calamities yourself – and it's for that reason your heart feels compassion." And he concluded with "forgive my impertinence and impropriety, Makar Alexeyevich". I reply to him that I'd be only too glad, but that I've got nothing, absolutely nothing. "Makar Alexeyevich, old fellow," he says to me, "I'm not asking for a lot, but it's like this" – at that point he went quite red – "the wife," he says, "the children – going hungry – just ten copecks or so." Well, at this point my own heart began to ache. I think to myself, I'm easily outdone! But all that I had left was twenty copecks, and I was counting on them: I meant to spend them tomorrow on my most pressing needs. "No, my dear, I can't; it's like this," I say. "Makar Alexeyevich, old fellow, whatever you will," he says, "even ten copecks." Well and I took my twenty copecks out of the drawer and gave them to him, my dear, a good deed, after all! Ah, poverty! I had a little chat with him: how is it, old fellow, I ask, that you're in such need, and yet even while being so needy you rent a room costing five silver roubles? He explained to me that he took the room six months ago and paid the money for three months in advance; then later on such circumstances arose that the poor man could go neither one way nor the other. He expected his case to have come to an end by now. And his case is an unpleasant one. You see, Varenka, he's answerable for something before the court. He's at law with some merchant who cheated on a government contract; the deception was uncovered, the merchant put on trial, and he got Gorshkov, who also happened to be involved somehow, implicated in

his villainous business. But in truth Gorshkov is guilty only of negligence, of carelessness and of an unforgivable failure to keep the government's interests in view. The case has already been going on for several years: Gorshkov keeps coming up against various obstacles. "I'm innocent of the dishonesty of which I'm accused," Gorshkov says to me, "totally innocent, innocent of cheating and robbery." The case has rather sullied him; he's been dismissed from his position, and although he wasn't found to be fundamentally guilty, until his complete vindication he's still unable to obtain from the merchant some notable sum of money that's due to him and which he's seeking before the court. I believe him, but the court doesn't trust his word, and it's the sort of case that's all so hooked up and knotted that you won't untangle it in a hundred years. No sooner do they untangle it a little than the merchant finds another hook and then another hook. I have heartfelt sympathy for Gorshkov, my dear, I commiserate with him. A man without a post; he's not taken on anywhere because he's unreliable; what was held in reserve has been spent on food; the case is complicated, but in the meantime they had to live, and in the meantime, without warning, quite inopportunely, a baby was born – well and there you have expenses: the son fell ill – expenses, he died – expenses; his wife is sick; he has some chronic illness: in short, he's suffered, he's suffered quite enough. He says, incidentally, that he expects a favourable resolution of his case in a few days' time, and that there's not even any doubt about it now. I feel sorry, sorry, so very sorry for him, my dear! I was kind to him. He's a lost and muddled man; he's looking for protection, so I was kind to him. Well, goodbye then, my dear. Christ be with you, keep well. My sweetheart! When I think of you, it's as if I'm holding some healing balm to my sick soul, and although I suffer for you, I find that even suffering for you is easy.

Your sincere friend  
Makar Devushkin

My dear, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I'm beside myself as I write to you. I'm all agitated over a dreadful occurrence. My head's spinning around. I feel that everything around me is spinning. Ah, my dear, what am I going to tell you now! This we didn't foresee. No, I don't believe I didn't foresee it; I foresaw it all. My heart sensed it all in advance! I even dreamt of something similar the other night.

This is what happened! I'll tell you without any style, but just as the Lord puts it into my heart. I went to work today. I arrived and I'm sitting writing. And you ought to know, my dear, that I was writing yesterday too. Well, so yesterday Timofey Ivanovich comes up to me and is so good as to give me instructions personally, to the effect that "the document's needed urgently". "Copy it out, Makar Alexeyevich," he says, "neatly, quickly and accurately; it's going for signature today." You should note, little angel, that I wasn't myself yesterday, didn't feel like looking at anything; such sorrow and anguish came over me! There was coldness in my heart and darkness in my soul; you were in my mind all the time, my little flower; well, I set about making the copy; I copied it out neatly and well, only I just don't know how to put it to you more precisely, whether it was the Devil himself that got into me, or whether it was determined by some secret fate, or whether it just had to happen that way – only I omitted a whole line; what sense came of it, God knows, simply no sense came of it at all. They were late with the document yesterday and presented it to his Excellency for signature only today. I appear today at the usual hour as if nothing has happened and take my place alongside Yemelyan Ivanovich. You should note, dear, that recently I've begun to feel ashamed and suffer from embarrassment twice as much as before. Of late I've not even been looking at anybody. Someone's chair just has to scrape, and I'm already petrified. And that's just how it was today, I was sitting quiet, hunched, curled up like a hedgehog, and so Yefim Akimovich (such a trouble-maker as the world had never seen before him) said so that all could hear: "Makar Alexeyevich, why are you sitting there like this?" And then he pulled such a face that everyone that was near him and me simply fell about laughing, and it goes without saying, at my expense. And off they went, off they went! I laid back my ears, and I screwed up my eyes, and I sit there not

stirring. That's my custom; that way they leave me alone sooner. Suddenly I can hear there's noise, running around, bustle; I can hear – or are my ears deceiving themselves? They're calling for me, they're demanding me, they're calling for Devushkin. My heart began to tremble in my breast, and I just don't know myself why I took fright; I only know that I took fright like I never had before in my life. I was rooted to my chair – and I behaved as if nothing was wrong, as if I wasn't me. But then they started again, closer and closer. And then it was right in my ear: "Devushkin! Devushkin! Where's Devushkin?" I raise my eyes: Yevstafy Ivanovich is in front of me saying: "Makar Alexeyevich, to his Excellency, quickly! You've made a mess of the document!" And it was just this one thing he said, but that was enough, wasn't it, my dear, enough had been said? I went numb, turned to ice, lost all feeling, and I went – well, I set off simply more dead than alive. I'm led through one room, through another room, through a third room, into his office – and I stood before him! I can't give you a positive report about what I was then thinking. I see his Excellency standing there and all of them around him. I don't think I bowed; I forgot. I was so dumbstruck that my lips were shaking and my legs were shaking. And not without reason, my dear. Firstly, I was ashamed; I glanced to the right at the mirror, and there really was every reason to go mad at what I saw there. And secondly, I've always behaved as if I was nowhere to be found on earth. So that his Excellency was scarcely aware of my existence. Perhaps he'd heard just in passing that they had a Devushkin in the department, but he'd never come into any close contact with him.

He began angrily. "How could you, sir! What are you thinking of? A vital document, needed in a hurry, and you ruin it. And how could you," – at this point his Excellency turned to Yevstafy Ivanovich. I only hear the sounds of the words reaching me: "Negligence! Carelessness! Trouble-making!" I tried to open my mouth to say something. I'd have liked to ask forgiveness, but I couldn't, to run away – but I didn't dare try, and at that point... at that point, my dear, such a thing happened that even now I can scarcely hold my pen from shame. My button – the Devil take it – the button I had hanging by a thread – suddenly came off, fell, bounced (I'd accidentally knocked it, evidently), tinkled, and rolled away, the damned thing, straight, absolutely straight up to his Excellency's feet, and all this in

the midst of universal silence! And that was all my justification, all my apology, all my reply, all I'd been intending to say to his Excellency! The consequences were dreadful! His Excellency immediately turned his attention to my figure and my clothes. I remembered what I'd seen in the mirror: I rushed to catch the button! I was that foolish! I bend down and try to pick the button up – it rolls, spins, I can't catch it, in short, I excelled in respect of agility too. It's at this point I feel that my last ounce of strength is leaving me, that now everything, everything is lost! The whole reputation is lost, the whole man is ruined! And at this point, for no reason at all, in both ears there's Tereza and Faldoni and everything starts ringing. Finally I caught the button, stood up, pulled myself erect, and if I'd not been such an idiot, I'd have stood there quietly at attention! But no: I started holding the button up to the dangling threads, as if it would attach itself as a result; and I'm smiling too, I'm smiling too. His Excellency turned away at first, then he glanced at me again – I hear him say to Yevstafy Ivanovich: "How can it be?... Look at the state he's in! How can he!... What has he!..." Ah, my dear, why this – how can he? And what has he? I'd excelled! I hear Yevstafy Ivanovich say: "He's not been detected, not detected in anything, of exemplary behaviour, sufficient income, on the salary scale..." – "Well, somehow alleviate for him," says his Excellency. "Give him an advance..." – "He's taken one, so they say, he's taken one, taken it in advance in respect of such and such a period. Probably such circumstances, but of good behaviour and not detected, never detected." I was burning, my angel, I was burning in the fires of hell! I was dying! "Well," says his Excellency loudly, "it's to be copied out again quickly; Devushkin, come here, copy it out again once more without any mistakes – and listen..." At that point his Excellency turned back to the others, gave out various orders, and everyone dispersed. No sooner had they dispersed than his Excellency hurriedly takes out his wallet, and from it a hundred-rouble note. "There," he says, "any way I can, consider it as you wish..." – and he pressed it into my hand. I gave a start, my angel, my entire soul was shaken; I don't know what came over me; I almost tried to seize him by the hand. And he went quite red, my poppet, and – and here I'm not diverging even a hair's breadth from the truth, my dear: he took my unworthy hand, and he shook it, he actually took it and shook it, as if it belonged to his equal, as if it belonged to a general like him himself.

“Off you go,” he says, “any way I can... Don’t make any mistakes, you’re costing money now.”

Right, my dear, this is what I’ve decided: I’m asking you and Fedora, and if I had children I’d order them too, to pray to God, and this is how: you may not pray for your natural father, but you should pray every day and for ever on behalf of his Excellency! I’ll say one thing more, my dear, and I say this solemnly – pay good heed to me, my dear – I swear that, however I might be suffering from spiritual grief in the hard days of our misfortune, looking at you, at your calamities and at myself, at my degradation and my incapability, despite all this I swear to you that it’s not so much the hundred roubles that are dear to me, as the fact that his Excellency himself was good enough to shake my unworthy hand, the hand of a drunkard, a wisp of straw! By doing so he gave me back to myself. By this deed he resurrected my spirit, made my life for ever sweeter, and I’m firmly convinced that, no matter how sinful I am before the Almighty, still that prayer for the happiness and prosperity of his Excellency will reach His throne!...

My dear! I’m in dreadful spiritual confusion now, in dreadful agitation! My heart is beating and wants to leap out of my breast. And I myself seem to have gone all weak somehow. I’m sending you forty-five paper roubles, I’m giving twenty to my landlady, and I’m leaving myself thirty-five: I’ll get my clothing seen to for twenty, and I’ll leave fifteen to live on. But it’s only now that all these impressions from the morning have shaken my whole existence. I’ll lie down for a while. I do, however, feel calm, very calm. Only my soul aches, and there, deep down, I can sense my soul trembling, quivering, stirring. I’ll come and see you; but now I’m simply drunk from all these sensations... God sees everything, my dear, my priceless little sweetheart!

Your worthy friend  
Makar Devushkin

10th September

My dear Makar Alexeyevich!

I'm more glad than I can say about your good fortune and can appreciate the virtues of your superior, my friend. And so now you will have some rest from sorrow! Only for God's sake don't spend the money to no good purpose again. Live quietly, as modestly as possible, and right from today begin always putting at least something aside, so that misfortunes don't suddenly come upon you again. For God's sake don't worry about us. Fedora and I will survive somehow. Why did you send us so much money, Makar Alexeyevich? We don't need it at all. We're content with what we have. True, we shall need money soon to move out of this apartment, but Fedora hopes to be repaid an old debt by someone from long ago. Anyway, I'm leaving myself twenty roubles for extreme needs. The remainder I'm sending back to you. Please look after the money, Makar Alexeyevich. Goodbye. Live a calm life now, keep well and cheerful. I would write more to you, but I feel terribly tired, I didn't get out of bed the whole day yesterday. You did well, promising to drop in. Come and see me please, Makar Alexeyevich.

V.D.

My sweet Varvara Alexeyevna!

I beg you, my dear, don't part from me now, now, when I'm completely happy and content with everything. My poppet! Don't you listen to Fedora, and I'll do anything you like; I'll behave well, out of respect for his Excellency alone I'll behave well and responsibly; we'll write one another happy letters again, we'll confide to one another our thoughts, our joys, our worries, if we have any worries; we'll live together in harmony and happiness. We'll take up literature... My little angel! Everything in my fate has altered, and everything has altered for the better. My landlady has become more compliant, Tereza more intelligent, even Faldoni himself has become kind of nimble. I've made up with Ratazyayev. I went to him myself in sheer joy. He really is a nice chap, my dear, and when people spoke badly of him, that was all rubbish. I've now discovered it was all a vile slander. He wasn't thinking of describing us at all: he told me so himself. He read me a new work. And the fact that he called me Lovelace that time, none of that was abuse or some unseemly name: he explained to me. It's taken word for word from a foreign language and means *a nimble chap*, and if you put it rather more prettily, rather more literarily, then it means *a lad who keeps things safe* – there! And not anything off. It was an innocent joke, my little angel. I, an ignoramus, was stupid enough to take offence. But now I've apologized to him... And the weather's so splendid today, Varenka, it's so nice. True, there was a bit of drizzle in the morning, as if it was being sprinkled through a sieve. Never mind! To make up for it, the air became a little fresher. I went to buy some boots and bought amazing ones. I walked down Nevsky. I read *The Bee*.<sup>\*</sup> Oh yes! I'm actually forgetting to tell you about the main thing.

You see, the thing is this:

I had a conversation this morning with Yemelyan Ivanovich and Aksenty Mikhailovich about his Excellency. Yes, Varenka, it's not just me that he's treated so charitably. He's been a benefactor not only to me, and is known to all the world for his kindness of heart. Praises are offered up in his honour and tears of gratitude shed in many quarters. He brought up an orphan. He was good enough to get her settled: he gave her in marriage to a well-known man, a certain civil servant who was officer for special commissions in the service of

his Excellency himself. He found a job in some office for the son of a certain widow and has done a lot more good deeds of various kinds. I, my dear, considered it my duty to put my own word in straight away and told everyone about his Excellency's deed for all to hear; I told them everything and concealed nothing. I hid my shame in my pocket. What shame could there be, what pride could there be in the face of such a thing? Right out loud – glory to the deeds of his Excellency! I spoke captivatingly, I spoke with fervour and I didn't blush, on the contrary, I was proud that I had to tell such a thing. I told about everything (I maintained a prudent silence only about you, my dear), about my landlady, and about Faldoni, and about Ratazyayev, and about my boots, and about Markov – I told it all. A couple of them exchanged smiles, well, to tell the truth, they all exchanged smiles. Only it's probably in my figure they found something funny, or on account of my boots – exactly, on account of my boots. But they couldn't have done it with any ill intent. It's just youth, or because of the fact that they're rich people, but they couldn't possibly have mocked my speech with any ill, any evil intent. That is, anything on account of his Excellency – they couldn't possibly have done that. Isn't that so, Varenka?

I'm still unable to come to my senses somehow even now, my dear. All these events have confused me so! Do you have firewood? Don't catch cold, Varenka; it doesn't take a moment to catch cold. Oh, my dear, you and your sad thoughts are killing me. I pray to God, how I pray to Him for you, my dear! For example, do you have woollen stockings, or anything warm in the way of clothes? Now, sweetheart, if you need anything, then for God's sake don't you go upsetting an old man. Just you come straight to me. The bad times are over now. Don't you worry on my account. Everything ahead is so nice and bright!

It's been a sad time though, Varenka! But then it doesn't matter, it's over! The years will pass, and we'll just sigh about this time. I remember my young days. What! There were times I didn't have a copeck. I was cold and hungry, but cheerful, and that's that. You'd walk down Nevsky in the morning, come across a pretty little face, and you were happy all day long. It was a great, great time, my dear! It's good to be alive, Varenka! Especially in St Petersburg. Yesterday, with tears in my eyes, I repented before the Lord God and asked the

Lord to forgive me all my sins in this sad time: my grumbling, liberal ideas, rowdy behaviour, hot-headedness. I remembered you fondly in my prayer. You alone, my little angel, have fortified me, you alone have consoled me, sent me on my way with good advice and instruction. I can never forget that, my dear. I kissed all your little notes today, my poppet! Well, goodbye, my dear. They say that somewhere not far from here there's some clothing for sale. So I'll go and do a little enquiring. Goodbye, little angel. Goodbye.

Your sincerely devoted

Makar Devushkin

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

I'm all in terrible agitation. Listen to what's happened here. I have a presentiment of something fateful. Judge for yourself, my priceless friend: Mr Bykov is in St Petersburg. Fedora met him. He was riding along and ordered the droshky to be stopped, he approached Fedora himself and began enquiring where she lived. She didn't say at first. Then he said with a smirk that he knew who was living with her. (Anna Fyodorovna has evidently told him everything.) Then Fedora couldn't stop herself and right there in the street began reproaching him, chiding him, told him he was an immoral man, that he was the cause of all my misfortunes. He replied that it stands to reason that someone has misfortunes when they've got no money. Fedora told him I could have made a living by working, could have married, or else could have found a post of some sort, but that now my happiness was lost for ever, and that what's more I was sick and would soon be dead. To this he remarked that I was still too young, that my head was still full of ideas, and *that our virtues too had grown tarnished* (his words). Fedora and I had thought that he didn't know where our apartment was, when suddenly yesterday, when I'd just gone out to Gostiny Dvor to do some shopping, he comes into our room; it seems he didn't want to catch me at home. He spent a long time questioning Fedora about our way of life, examined all our things, looked at my work and finally asked: "Who's this clerk that's acquainted with you?" At that moment you were going across the courtyard; Fedora pointed you out to him; he took a glance and gave a smirk; Fedora begged him to leave, told him that distress had already made me unwell as it was, and that it would be extremely unpleasant for me to see him in our home. He was silent for a while; he said he'd come for no reason, because he had nothing else to do, and he tried to give Fedora twenty-five roubles; she, naturally, didn't take them. What could this mean? Why was it he visited us? I can't understand how he knows everything about us! I'm completely at a loss. Fedora says that her sister-in-law Aksinya, who comes to visit us, knows the laundress Nastasya, and Nastasya's cousin is a porter in the department where an acquaintance of Anna Fyodorovna's nephew works, so did some gossip perhaps creep over that way? Actually, it's highly likely that Fedora's mistaken; we don't know what to think. Surely he won't come and

visit us again! This idea alone horrifies me! When Fedora told me all this yesterday, I was so afraid that I almost fainted in fright. What else do they want? I don't want to know them now! What business do they have with poor me? Ah! How fearful I am now; I keep on thinking that Bykov will come in at any minute. What will happen to me? What else is Fate preparing for me? For Christ's sake, come and see me right now, Makar Alexeyevich. Come and see me, for God's sake, come and see me.

V.D.

My dear, Varvara Alexeyevna!

There took place in our apartment this day an impossibly mournful, inexplicable and unexpected event. Our poor Gorshkov (you should note, my dear) has been completely vindicated. The judgement had already been made some time ago, but today he went to hear the final resolution. The case concluded extremely happily for him. Whatever blame lay upon him for negligence and carelessness, complete absolution was granted for everything. It was adjudged that the notable sum of money should be obtained on his behalf from the merchant, so that he's both much improved in his circumstances, and his honour has been cleared of any stain, and everything's become better – in short, the result was the most complete fulfilment of his desires. He came home today at three o'clock. He looked awful, he's white as a sheet, his lips are trembling, but he's smiling – he hugged his wife and children. A whole band of us went to his room to congratulate him. He was extremely touched by our action, bowed to all sides, shook each of us by the hand several times. It even seemed to me he'd grown too, and straightened up, and that there was no longer any little tear in his eye. He was so agitated, the poor man. He couldn't stay in the same place for two minutes; he picked up anything that came to hand, then dropped it again, smiled and bowed continually, sat down, stood up, sat down again, said God knows what – "My honour," he says, "honour, good name, my children" – and the way he said it! He even started crying. We too for the most part shed a tear. Ratazyayev evidently wanted to encourage him and said: "What does honour matter, old boy, when you've nothing to eat; money, old boy, money's the main thing; that's what you should thank God for!" – and at that point he patted him on the shoulder. It seemed to me that Gorshkov was offended, that is, it wasn't that he expressed displeasure directly, but he just looked strangely somehow at Ratazyayev and removed his hand from his shoulder. And that wouldn't have happened before, my dear! Anyway, people have different characters. I, for example, wouldn't have shown myself to be arrogant at such a celebration; after all, my dear, sometimes even an unnecessary bow and you cause humiliation because of nothing more than an attack of kindness of spirit and an excess of softness of heart... but anyway, I'm not the one in question here! "Yes," he says, "the money's a good

thing too; thank God, thank God!” And after that, all the time we were with him, he kept repeating: “Thank God, thank God!...” His wife ordered a more refined and more plentiful dinner. Our landlady herself cooked for them. Our landlady is in part a kind woman. But Gorshkov couldn’t stay sitting in one place until dinner. He dropped into everyone’s rooms, whether he’d been invited or not. He’d just go in, smile, sit down on a chair, say something, or sometimes not even say anything – and leave. In the midshipman’s room he even picked up the cards, and they sat him down to play the fourth hand. He played and played, made a nonsense of something in the game, played three or four times, then gave up playing. “No,” he says, “I wasn’t serious, you know,” he says, “it was just for no reason.” – and left them. He met me in the corridor, took me by both hands, looked me straight in the eyes, only so oddly; he squeezed my hand and moved away, and still smiling, but smiling with difficulty somehow, strangely, like a dead man. His wife was crying with joy; everything was so cheerful in their room, festive. They’d soon had dinner. Then it’s after dinner he says to his wife: “Listen, darling, I’ll just lie down for a while,” – and he went to his bed. He called his daughter to him, laid his hand on her head and spent a long, long time stroking the child’s head. Then he turned to his wife again: “And what about Petyenka? Our Petya,” he says, “Petyenka?...” His wife crossed herself and replies that he’s dead, isn’t he. “Yes, yes, I know, I know everything. Petyenka’s in the Kingdom of Heaven now.” His wife can see that he’s not himself, that he’s been utterly shaken by what’s happened, and says to him: “You should go to sleep, darling.” – “Yes, all right, in a moment I’ll... just a little,” – at that point he turned away, lay for a while, then turned, tried to say something. His wife couldn’t make out what he’d said and asked him: “What, my friend?” But he doesn’t reply. She waited a little – well, she thinks, he’s fallen asleep, and she went out to spend an hour with the landlady. She returned an hour later – she sees her husband hasn’t woken up yet and is lying there not stirring. She thought he was asleep, sat down and started doing some work. She tells how she worked for about half an hour and became so immersed in her reflections that she can’t even remember what she was thinking about, she says only that she forgot about her husband. Only suddenly she came to with some sense of alarm and was struck first and foremost by the deathly silence in the

room. She looked at the bed and sees that her husband is still lying in the same position. She went up to him, pulled the blanket off, looks – and he's already cold – he's dead, my dear, Gorshkov's dead, died suddenly, as if he'd been struck by lightning! But what he died of – God knows. I've been so overwhelmed by this, Varenka, that I still can't collect my thoughts. I can't believe it somehow that a man could die so simply. Such a poor, hapless man, that Gorshkov! Ah, what a fate, what a fate! His wife in tears, so frightened. The little girl's hidden herself in a corner somewhere. They've got such a commotion going on there, a medical investigation's to be carried out... I can't tell you for sure. Only it's a pity, oh, what a pity! It's sad to think that you really don't know the day or the hour... You perish just like that, for nothing...

Your

Makar Devushkin

19th September

Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I hasten to inform you, my friend, that Ratazyayev has found me work with a certain author. Someone came to visit him and brought him such a thick manuscript – a lot of work, thank God. Only it's written so illegibly that I don't know how to set about the task; it's wanted quickly. It's all written about such things somehow, that you can't even seem to understand it... We've agreed on forty copecks a sheet. Why I'm writing you all this, my dear, is that now there'll be money on the side. Well, but goodbye now, my dear. I'm getting on with the work straight away.

Your faithful friend

Makar Devushkin

My dear friend, Makar Alexeyevich!

This is already the third day I've written nothing to you, my friend, but I've had many, many worries, and much anxiety.

Two days ago I had a visit from Bykov. I was alone, Fedora had gone out somewhere. I opened the door to him and was so frightened when I saw him that I was rooted to the spot. I sensed that I'd turned pale. He came in with a loud laugh as is his custom, took a chair and sat down. It was a long time before I could collect my thoughts, but finally I sat down in the corner at my work. He soon stopped laughing. My appearance seemed to shock him. I've grown so thin recently; my cheeks and eyes are sunken, I was as pale as my handkerchief... it really is hard for anyone who knew me a year ago to recognize me. He stared at me for a long time, but finally became cheerful once more. He said something or other, I don't remember what reply I gave him, and he started laughing again. He sat with me for a whole hour; he talked to me for a long time; asked some questions. Finally, before leaving, he took me by the hand and said (I'm writing it to you word for word): "Varvara Alexeyevna! Between you and me, Anna Fyodorovna, your relative and my close acquaintance and friend, is a most vile woman." (At that point he also called her by a certain indecent word.) "She has both led your cousin astray, and ruined you. For my part, I too have proved to be a villain in this instance, but then after all, it's an everyday business." At that point he started chuckling with all his might. Then he remarked that he wasn't a master of eloquence, and that the main thing that needed to be explained, and about which he was enjoined not to remain silent by the obligations of nobility, had now already been said, and that he was tackling the remainder in a few brief words. At that point he announced to me that he was seeking my hand, that he considered it his duty to return my honour to me, that he was rich, that he would take me away after the wedding to his village in the steppe, that he wanted to go hare-hunting there; that he would never again return to St Petersburg, because St Petersburg was disgusting, that here in St Petersburg he had, as he himself expressed it, a good-for-nothing nephew, whom he had sworn to deprive of his inheritance, and it was specifically for this eventuality, that is, wanting to have legitimate heirs, that he was seeking my hand, that that was the main reason for his courtship.

Then he remarked that I lived extremely poorly, that it was no wonder I was sick, living in such a hovel, he foretold my inevitable death if I stayed like this even for another month, said that apartments in St Petersburg were disgusting, and finally asked if I needed anything.

I was so shocked by his proposal that, without knowing why myself, I burst into tears. He took my tears for gratitude, and told me he had always been sure that I was a kind, sensitive and educated girl, but that he had nonetheless resolved on this step only after finding out in the fullest detail about my present behaviour. At that point he asked a lot of questions about you, said that he had heard about everything, that you were a man of noble principles, that he for his part didn't want to be indebted to you, and would five hundred roubles be enough for you for all that you'd done for me? And when I explained to him that you'd done things for me that couldn't be paid for with any money, he told me that that was all nonsense, that that was all novels, that I was still young and read poetry, that novels were the ruination of young girls, that books only did damage to morality and that he couldn't bear any books; he advised me to live as long as he had and then to talk about people; "then," he added, "you'll find out about people too." Then he said that I should have a good think about his proposals, that it would be most unpleasant for him if I took such an important step unthinkingly, added that unthinking and emotional behaviour were the ruination of inexperienced youth, but that he very much wished for a favourable reply on my part, and that otherwise, finally, he would be forced to marry a merchant's widow in Moscow, because, he says, "I've sworn to deprive my good-for-nothing nephew of his inheritance." He insisted on leaving five hundred roubles on my tambour, to buy sweets, as he put it; he said I'd grow round as a doughnut in the country, that I'd live on the fat of the land with him, that he had an awful lot to do at the moment, that he'd been running around on business the whole day and that he'd popped in to see me now in a free moment. At that point he left. I've thought for a long time, I've given it a great deal of thought, I've been in torment, thinking, my friend, and finally I've made up my mind. My friend, I'm going to marry him, I have to consent to his proposal. If anyone can rid me of my shame, return my honest name to me, stave off poverty, deprivation and misfortune from me in times to come, then it's him alone. What am I to expect from the future, what else

can I ask of Fate? Fedora says that you mustn't lose your happiness; she says – what is it then in that case that's called happiness? I at least can't find another way for myself, my priceless friend. What am I to do? As it is I've completely ruined my health with work; I can't work all the time. Leave home to work? I'll waste away, pining, and what's more I won't satisfy anyone. I'm sickly by nature and so I'll always be a burden on other people's hands. Of course, I'm not bound for paradise even now, but what am I to do, my friend, what am I to do? What choice do I have?

I didn't ask you for advice. I wanted to think it through alone. The decision that you've just read is irrevocable, and I'm announcing it at once to Bykov, who is hurrying me as it is for a final decision. He said his business won't wait, he needs to leave, and he can't delay things over trifles. God knows whether I'll be happy, my destiny is in His sacred, inscrutable power, but my mind is made up. They say Bykov is a kind man; he'll respect me; perhaps I too shall also come to respect him. What more can be expected from our marriage?

I'm informing you of everything, Makar Alexeyevich. I'm sure you'll understand all my anguish. Don't try to deflect me from my intention. Your efforts will be in vain. Weigh up in your own heart everything that's forced me to act in this way. I was very troubled at first, but now I'm calmer. What lies ahead, I don't know. What will be, will be; as God wills!...

Bykov has arrived; I'm leaving the letter unfinished. I wanted to say a lot more to you. Bykov's already here!

V.D.

My dear, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I hasten to reply to you, my dear; I hasten to announce to you, my dear, that I'm astonished. All this isn't right somehow... Yesterday we buried Gorshkov. Yes, it's so, Varenka, it's so; Bykov has acted nobly; only you see, my dear, the thing is, you're accepting. Of course, the will of God is in everything; it's so, it must be so without fail, that is, the will of God must without fail be here; and the Providence of the Heavenly Creator is, of course, both good and inscrutable, and destiny too, it's just the same. Fedora is concerned for you too. Of course, you'll be happy now, my dear, you'll enjoy prosperity, sweetheart, my little flower, my little beauty, my little angel – only you see, Varenka, how can it be so soon?... Yes, business... Mr Bykov has business – of course, who doesn't have business, and he might well have some too... I saw him as he was leaving your apartment. A fine, fine figure of a man; even a very fine figure of a man. Only it isn't right somehow, all this, it's not really a matter of him being a fine figure of a man, and I'm somehow not myself either at the moment. Only how ever are we going to write letters to each other now? I, how am I to remain by myself? I'm weighing everything up, my little angel, I'm weighing everything up, as you wrote to me, I'm weighing it all up in my heart, these reasons. I was already finishing copying the twentieth sheet, and in the meantime these events have come upon me! My dear, I mean, you're going, so you'll need to do various bits of shopping, some shoes, a dress, and there's a shop I know too, incidentally, on Gorokhovaya; you remember how I kept describing it to you as well? But no! How can you, my dear, what do you mean? I mean, you can't leave now, it's just not possible, not possible at all. I mean, you need to do a lot of shopping, and get yourself a carriage. What's more, the weather's bad now too; you just look at the way the rain's pouring down, and it's such wet rain, and also... also the fact that you'll be cold, my little angel; your little heart will be cold! I mean, you're afraid of strangers, but you're leaving. And who'll I be left with here by myself? And Fedora says great happiness awaits you... but she's a troublesome woman, after all, and wants to ruin me. Will you be going to church tonight, my dear? I'd come along to look at you. It's true, my dear, absolutely true, that you're an educated, virtuous and sensitive girl, only let him rather marry the merchant's widow! What

do you think, my dear? Let him rather marry that merchant's widow! As soon as it gets dark, my little Varenka, I'll just pop in to see you for an hour. It's getting dark early today, you know, and I'll just pop in. I'll be sure to come and see you for an hour today, my dear. You're expecting Bykov now, but as soon as he goes, then... Just wait, my dear, I'll pop in...

Makar Devushkin

My friend, Makar Alexeyevich!

Mr Bykov said that I should be sure to have enough holland for three dozen shirts. So seamstresses need to be found for two dozen as quickly as possible, and we have very little time. Mr Bykov is getting angry, he says there's an awful lot of fuss about these bits of clothes. Our wedding is in five days' time, and we're leaving the day after the wedding. Mr Bykov is in a hurry, he says there's no need to lose a lot of time over nonsense. The preparations have worn me out, and I can scarcely stay on my feet. There's a dreadful amount to be done, but it really would be better if there were none of it. And another thing: we don't have enough white silk lace or ordinary lace, so some more needs to be bought, because Mr Bykov says he doesn't want his wife going around like a cook, and I must be sure to "put all the landowners' wives' noses out of joint". That's what he himself says. So, Makar Alexeyevich, take yourself off, please, to Mme Chiffon on Gorokhovaya and ask her firstly to send some seamstresses to us, and secondly to take the trouble to come herself as well. I'm ill today. Our new apartment's so cold, and in dreadful disorder. Mr Bykov's auntie can hardly breathe, she's so old. I'm afraid she might die before our departure, but Mr Bykov says it's all right, she'll recover. The house is in dreadful disorder. Mr Bykov isn't living with us, so all the servants run off God knows where. There are times when Fedora's serving us by herself; while Mr Bykov's valet, who looks after everything, is missing, no one knows where, for the third day now. Mr Bykov drops in every morning, keeps getting angry, and yesterday hit the house steward, which caused him some unpleasantness with the police... There's been nobody to send to you with letters. I'm writing by the city post. Yes! I almost forgot the most important thing. Tell Mme Chiffon to be sure to change the white silk lace in accordance with yesterday's sample, and to call on me herself to show me the new selection. And tell her as well that I've changed my mind about the canezhou; that it should be crocheted. And another thing: the letters for the monograms on the handkerchiefs should be embroidered in chain-stitch; do you hear? In chain-stitch, not satin-stitch. Mind you don't forget, in chain-stitch! There's something else I almost forgot! For God's sake tell her that the leaves on the pelerine should be in raised stitching, the tendrils and thorns should be in *cordonnet*, and then the

collar should be trimmed with lace or a wide falbala. Please tell her, Makar Alexeyevich.

Your  
V.D.

PS: I feel so guilty that I keep on troubling you with my errands. This is the third day you've spent the whole morning running around. But what's to be done? There's no order at home here, and I'm unwell myself. So don't be annoyed with me, Makar Alexeyevich. Such anguish! Ah, what's going to happen, my friend, my dear, my kind Makar Alexeyevich! I'm afraid even to take a look into my future. I have a constant premonition of something, and it's as if I'm living in some sort of fog.

PS: For God's sake, my friend, don't forget anything of what I've just been telling you. I keep worrying in case you make some mistake. And remember, chain-stitch, not satin-stitch.

V.D.

27th September

Madam, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I've carried out all your errands assiduously. Mme Chiffon says she was herself already thinking of doing the trimming in chain-stitch; that it's more respectable or something, I don't know, I didn't grasp it very well. And another thing, you wrote about a falbala, well she said something about a falbala too, only I've forgotten, my dear, what she said to me about a falbala. I only remember she said a great deal; such an awful woman! Now what was it? Well, she'll tell you everything herself. I'm completely fagged out, my dear. I didn't even go to work today. Only you've no reason to despair, my dear. For your peace of mind I'm prepared to run around all the shops. You write that you're afraid to take a look into the future. But after all, by seven o'clock today you'll know everything. Mme Chiffon will come and see you herself. So don't you despair; have hope, my dear, and maybe everything will turn out for the best – there. So yes, that damned falbala, I keep – oh, I'm fed up with that falbala, the falbala! I'd pop in to see you, little angel, I'd pop in, I'd definitely pop in; I've already walked up to the gates of your house a couple of times as it is. Only it's Bykov, that is, what I mean is Mr Bykov is always so angry, so that it's not quite... Well, so what!

Makar Devushkin

28th September

Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich!

For God's sake, run to the jeweller straight away. Tell him there's no need to make the pearl and emerald earrings. Mr Bykov says that's too grand, that it's exorbitant. He's angry; he says he's spending a fortune as it is and that we're robbing him, and yesterday he said that if he'd had the least inkling beforehand of such expenses, he wouldn't have got involved. He says that just as soon as we're wed, we'll be leaving straight away, that there'll be no guests, and that I shouldn't entertain hopes of spinning and twirling, that party-time is still a long way off. That's the way he talks! And God knows, do I need all this? Mr Bykov ordered everything himself. I don't even dare say anything to him in reply: he's so hot-tempered. What will become of me?

V.D.

28th September

Sweetheart, Varvara Alexeyevna!

I – that is, the jeweller says – all right; but I wanted to say of myself first that I've fallen ill and can't get out of bed. Right now, when a busy, vital time's arrived, that's when I get an attack of the chills, the Devil take them! I can also inform you that on top of all my misfortunes, his Excellency has been pleased to be strict as well, and got very angry with Yemelyan Ivanovich, and shouted, and towards the end was completely worn out, the poor man. So here I am informing you about everything. And I wanted to write you something else too, only I'm afraid of troubling you. After all, my dear, I'm a stupid, simple man, I write anything that comes into my head, so perhaps there's something you might even – well, so what!

Your

Makar Devushkin

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear!

I saw Fedora today, my sweetheart. She says that tomorrow you'll already be wed, and you'll be leaving the day after tomorrow, and that Mr Bykov is already hiring the horses. I've already informed you regarding his Excellency, my dear. And another thing: I've checked the bills from the shop on Gorokhovaya; everything's correct, only very expensive. Only why is it that Mr Bykov gets angry with you? Well, be happy, my dear! I'm glad; yes, I'll be glad if you're happy. I'd come to the church, my dear, but I can't, I've got lumbago. So I'm still on about the letters: I mean, who will deliver them to us now, my dear? Yes! You were charitable to Fedora, my dear! It was a good deed you did, my friend; it was a very good thing you did. A good deed! And for every good deed the Lord will bless you. Good deeds don't go unrewarded, and virtue will always be crowned with the crown of God's justice, sooner or later. My dear! I'd like to write you a lot, so that every hour, every minute I'd keep on writing, I'd keep on writing! I still have one of your books, *Belkin's Tales*, but, you know, my dear, don't take it away from me, give it to me, sweetheart. It's not because I want to read it so very much. But you know yourself, my dear, winter's coming; the evenings will be long; it'll be sad, then would be the time for a read. I'm going to move from my apartment to your old one, my dear, and I'm going to rent from Fedora. I'll not part from that honest woman for anything now; what's more, she's so hard-working. I had a close look at your empty apartment yesterday. As your tambour was, and on it your sewing, so it's remained there, untouched: it's in the corner. I examined your embroidery. Some pieces still remain here. You were just beginning to wind thread onto one of my letters. In a drawer I found a sheet of paper, and on the paper was written: "Dear sir, Makar Alexeyevich, I make haste" – and that was all. Someone evidently interrupted you at the most interesting part. In the corner behind the little screens stands your bed... My sweetheart!!! Well, goodbye, goodbye; for God's sake let me have some reply to this letter quickly.

Makar Devushkin

My priceless friend, Makar Alexeyevich!

All is done! My lot has been cast, what it will be, I don't know, but I submit to the will of the Lord. We're leaving tomorrow. I'm bidding you farewell for the last time, my priceless friend, my benefactor, my dear! Don't grieve over me, live happily, remember me, and may God's blessing be upon you! I shall remember you often in my thoughts and in my prayers. So this time has come to an end! I shall carry little of comfort into my new life from memories of the past; all the more dear will be the memory of you, all the more dear will you be to my heart. You are my only friend; just you alone here loved me. For I saw everything, you know, I knew how you loved me! You were happy with one smile from me, with one line of my writing. Now you'll have to try to get along without me! How will you stay here by yourself? Who here will look after you, my good, my priceless, my only friend! I'm leaving you the book, the tambour, the letter I started; whenever you look at those lines I began, read on in your thoughts everything you'd like to hear or read from me, everything I might have written you; and what might I have written now! Think of your poor Varenka, who loved you so much. All your letters are still in the top drawer of Fedora's chest of drawers. You write that you're ill, but Mr Bykov isn't letting me go out anywhere today. I shall write to you, my friend, I promise, but then God alone knows what might happen. And so now we'll say farewell for ever, my friend, my sweetheart, my dear, for ever!... Oh, how I'd like to hold you now! Farewell, my friend, farewell, farewell. Live happily; keep well. My prayer will always be for you. Oh, how sad I am, how crushed my whole spirit. Mr Bykov is calling me.

Your eternally loving

V.

PS: My soul is so full, so full now of tears...

Tears are constricting me, tearing me apart. Farewell.

God! What sadness!

Remember, remember your poor Varenka!

My dear, Varenka, my sweetheart, my priceless one! You're being carried off, you're leaving! It'd be better now if they tore the heart from my breast, than you from me! How can you? So you're crying, and you're leaving?! I've just now received a letter from you all spotted with tears. That means you don't want to leave; that means you're being carried off forcibly, that means you feel sorry for me, that means you love me! But I don't understand, who will you be with now? Your little heart will be sad, sick and cold there. Anguish will gnaw at it, sadness will tear it in two. You'll die there, they'll lay you in the cold earth there; there'll be nobody even to cry over you there! Mr Bykov will be hunting hares all the time... Ah, my dear, my dear! What is it you've resolved upon, how could you have resolved upon such a step? What have you done, what have you done, what have you done to yourself? I mean, you'll be driven to your grave there; they'll wear you out there, my little angel. I mean, you're delicate as a feather, my dear. And where was I? Why was I just staring like an idiot? I can see the child's being silly, the little child's just got a headache. Instead of just simply – but oh no, I'm a complete idiot, and I don't think anything, and I don't see anything, as if I'm right and as if it's none of my business; and on top of that I went running around about a furbelow!... No, Varenka, I'll get up; perhaps I'll be better by tomorrow, and then I'll get up!... I'll throw myself under the wheels, my dear; I won't let you go away! No, really, what is all this? By what rights is it all being done? I'll go away with you; I'll run after your carriage, if you won't take me, I'll run for all I'm worth until I drop dead. But do you know what it's like there, where it is you're going, my dear? Perhaps you don't know, so then ask me! There's the steppe there, my dear, there's the steppe, the bare steppe; bare as the palm of my hand! There's peasants there, unfeeling women and uneducated men, there's drunkards. The leaves have fallen from the trees there now, it's raining there, it's cold – and you're going there! Well, Mr Bykov has something to do there – he'll be with the hares there – but what about you? You want to be a landowner's wife, my dear? But my little cherub, you just take a look at yourself, do you look like a landowner's wife?... How can it possibly be, Varenka? Who ever will I write letters to, my dear? Yes! You just take into consideration, my dear – "who ever will he write letters to?" Who will I call my dear; who will I call by such a nice name? Where am I to find you later on,

my little angel? I'll die, Varenka, I'll die for sure; my heart won't survive such a misfortune! I loved you like the Lord's light, loved you like my own daughter, I loved everything about you, my dear, my dear! And I lived for just you alone! I worked, and I wrote documents, and went about, and went for walks, and transferred my observations onto paper in the form of friendly letters, all because of the fact that you, my dear, lived here, opposite, nearby. Perhaps you didn't even know it, but that's precisely how it all was! Just listen, my dear, you judge, my dear sweetheart, how can it possibly be that you might go away from us? My dear, you mustn't leave, you know, it's not possible; there's simply definitely no possibility at all! I mean, it's raining, and you're weak, you'll catch cold. Your carriage will get wet; it's sure to get wet. As soon as you leave the city gate, it'll break down too; it'll break down on purpose. After all, they're really bad at making carriages here in St Petersburg! I know all those coach-builders too; they only want to build something fashionable, some smart toy, but they don't make them sturdy, I swear they don't! I'll throw myself onto my knees before Mr Bykov, my dear; I'll make him see, I'll make him see everything! And you make him see too, my dear; reason with him and make him see! Tell him you're staying, that you can't leave!... Ah, why is it he didn't marry the merchant's widow in Moscow? He should've married her there! The merchant's widow would be better, she'd suit him much better, and I know why! And I'd keep you here with me. What is he to you, my dear, this Bykov? How has he suddenly made himself dear to you? Perhaps it's because he keeps buying you falbalas, perhaps that's why it is? But I mean, what's a falbala? Why a falbala? After all, my dear, it's nonsense! We're talking about a human life here, my dear, whereas a falbala is, you know, just cloth; a falbala, my dear – it's just a bit of cloth. As soon as I get my salary, I'll buy you loads of falbalas myself; I'll buy you loads of them, my dear; there's even this little shop I know; just let me wait for my salary. Varenka, my little cherub! Oh Lord, Lord! So you're definitely going away to the steppe with Mr Bykov, going away and not coming back! Ah, my dear!... No, write some more to me, write me another nice letter about everything, and when you go away, write me a letter from there as well. Otherwise, my heavenly angel, this will be the last letter, you know, but I mean it can't possibly be the case that this letter should be the last. I mean, how could it be, that

suddenly, specifically, definitely the last? But no, I'll write, and you write too... Because my style's taking shape now too... Ah my dear, what does style matter! I mean, I don't even know now what it is I'm writing, I don't know at all, I don't know anything, and I'm not rereading and I'm not correcting the style, but I'm writing just for the sake of writing, just for the sake of writing some more to you... My sweetheart, my dear, my dear!



## Notes

**Prince V.F. Odoevsky:** The epigraph is a slightly inaccurate quotation from the story ‘The Living Dead Man’ (1844) by Prince Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoevsky (1804–69).

**Brambeus:** Baron Brambeus was one of the literary pseudonyms of Osip Ivanovich Senkovsky (1800–58), editor of the popular journal *The Library for Reading* and a favourite of less sophisticated readers.

**seven paper roubles... five silver roubles:** Paper money was introduced in Russia in 1769; in 1839 the official value of one silver rouble was 3.5 paper ones.

**Tereza and Faldoni:** The names of the two servants are taken from a French novel by Nicolas-Germain Léonard (1744–93), *The Letters of Two Lovers Living in Lyons, Containing the Story of Thérèse and Faldoni* (1783), published in Russian translation in 1804 and 1816.

**Lhomond’s grammar:** The French grammar of 1780 by the abbé Charles François Lhomond (1727–94) was published in Russian translation many times in the early nineteenth century.

**Zapolsky’s:** This rival to Lhomond’s French grammar was first published in 1817.

**the complete works of Pushkin in the latest edition:** the first posthumous edition of the works of Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799–1837) came out in eleven volumes between 1838 and 1841.

**Gostiny Dvor:** Gostiny Dvor is the arcaded trading area on Nevsky Avenue.

**The same one that always puts her skirt on inside out:** The first two extracts from Ratazyayev’s writing are pastiches of popular contemporary styles, but the third is specifically modelled on ‘The Tale of how Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich’ (1835)

by Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809–52).

**Paul de Kock:** Paul de Kock (1793–1871), a prolific French novelist much translated into Russian, whose works, primarily about middle-class Parisian life, were considered by conservative critics to be coarse and risqué.

**The Tales of Belkin:** Pushkin's first completed work of prose fiction, *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*; the five stories with an introduction were written in 1830 and first published anonymously in 1831.

**A Picture of a Man... The Boy Who Plays Various Things on the Bells and the Cranes of Ibucus:** Respectively a work of 1834 by Alexander Ivanovich Galich (1783–1848); an 1810 translation of *The Little Bell-ringer* (1809) by François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil (1761–1819); and the ballad of 1797 by Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805) in the translation of 1813 by Vasily Andreyevich Zhukovsky (1783–1852). By the 1840s all would have been considered old-fashioned and sentimental.

**'The Postmaster':** The fourth of the five stories that make up *The Tales of Belkin*, whose central character holds, like Devushkin, the rank of titular councillor.

**books now all have pictures and various descriptions:** This is a reference to the popular 'physiological sketches' of the 1840s – illustrated literary descriptions of various social types.

**'The Greatcoat':** Gogol's tale of a downtrodden titular councillor first appeared in volume 3 of the writer's collected works in 1843.

**a titular councillor:** The ninth rank in the Table of Ranks devised by Peter the Great in 1722.

**14th class:** The lowest rank in the Table of Ranks, a collegiate registrar.

**Lovelace:** The philandering villain of the novel in letters *Clarissa, Or the History of a Young Lady* (1748) by Samuel Richardson (1689–1761).

**Ivan the Fool:** A character from Russian folklore: of humble origins and naive character, he regularly overcomes all obstacles to achieve wealth, fame and often the hand of a beautiful princess.

**The Bee:** *The Northern Bee*, published from 1825 until 1864, was a notoriously conservative newspaper with an unsophisticated readership.



## Extra Material on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Poor People*

## Fyodor Dostoevsky's Life

### *Family Background*

The family name Dostoevsky was derived from the village Dostoev in the Minsk region. It was granted by the Prince of Pinsk in perpetuity to the boyar Danil Ivanovich Rtishchev in 1506 for services rendered. The city of Pinsk goes back to the eleventh century and forms the heartland of Belorussia. No fewer than four nationalities – Belorussian, Russian, Ukrainian and Polish – go into the composition of the Dostoevsky family tree, and the end result is about as multinational as was possible at the time. The Rtishchevs were Russian, the setting was Belorussian, the suffix “-sky” is predominantly Polish, and over the years some of the Dostoevskys moved and settled in the Ukraine, while others, like Fyodor Mikhailovich’s branch, ended up in Moscow. Dostoevsky’s father, Mikhail Andreyevich (1789–1839), was the son of a Ukrainian Uniate priest, Andrey Dostoevsky. Fyodor Mikhailovich himself, of course, never considered himself anything other than Russian. The eminent Dostoevsky scholar, Ludmila Saraskina, was recently asked if the writer was not of Polish blood, and she responded: “The Dostoevsky lineage presents a fascinating and unusual mixture of nationalities: in a family where the father was Lithuanian, the mother Ukrainian, there was a cult of Russian literature and history, the cult of reading. The atmosphere was one of devotion to the spoken word, and it is precisely this which above all else shaped the author’s creative make-up. Hence, Dostoevsky’s Russianness is a wholly cultural rather than ethnic phenomenon.” The concept “Lithuanian” must, of course, be understood in the traditional sense as in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which has precious little to do with modern Lithuania.

### *Birth and Early Years*

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in Moscow on 30th October 1821. In 1831, his father had bought a small estate, Darovoye, and two years later, the neighbouring Chermoshnya, which

would acquire lasting fame as Chermashnya in the violent murder plot of Karamazov senior in *The Karamazov Brothers*. Speaking of Darovoye, Dostoevsky confessed: “This small, insignificant place left in me the deepest and most memorable impression for life.” Fyodor was the second in a family of six siblings. His mother, Maria Fyodorovna (née Nekhayeva, 1800–37), a religious-minded woman, came from a merchant family. She taught him to read from an edition of *One Hundred and Four Old and New Testament Stories*, and within the family circle there were readings from Karamzin’s *The History of the Russian State*, as well as from the works of Derzhavin, Zhukovsky and Pushkin. Dostoevsky often sought the company of peasants, and his discussions with them proved to be a rich source of material for his future compositions.

### *Education*

In 1832 Dostoevsky and his brother Mikhail were educated at home by visiting tutors, and from 1833 they were placed in various boarding schools. Dostoevsky found the atmosphere in these establishments oppressive and uncongenial, and his only solace was extensive and intensive reading. From late 1834 to early 1837 the two brothers attended one of Moscow’s best private boarding schools, run by the Czech-born Leonty Ivanovich Chermak, a man of little or no education, but a brilliant, intuitive pedagogue and a humane and understanding father figure. State-run schools, on the other hand, had an overall unflattering reputation for frequent application of the disciplinary rod and staple bad food. The teacher of Russian, Nikolai Ivanovich Bilevich, turned out to be something of a role model and allegedly served as the prototype for Nikolai Semyonovich in *The Adolescent* (variously known as *A Raw Youth* and *An Accidental Family*), whom the hero Arkady picked at random as an appraiser of his autobiographical notes. “At long last I decided to seek someone’s counsel. Having cast around, I chose this gentleman with purposeful deliberation. Nikolai Semyonovich was my former tutor in Moscow, and Marya Ivanovna’s husband...” (*The Adolescent*, penultimate chapter.)

### *Parents’ Death*

By all accounts Dostoevsky's father, Mikhail Andreyevich, was an upstanding, hard-working family man – his one failing, however, being his touchy, short temper. After the death of his wife in 1837, he retired and settled in Darovoye, where he died on 6th June 1839. Officially the cause of death was recorded as apoplexy, but by all popular accounts he perished at the hands of his peasants, forming a possible clue to the origins of the plot involving the mysterious death of the head of the family in *The Karamazov Brothers*. The loss of his mother in 1837 coincided with the shattering news of Pushkin's fatal duel, which Dostoevsky perceived as a personal bereavement too. Dostoevsky's adulation of Pushkin continued all his life, and reached its apotheosis in 1880, only months before his own death.

### *Central Military Engineering Academy*

In May 1837 he enrolled at the Koronad Filippovich Kostomarov cramming institute, prior to applying to the Central Military Engineering Academy, where he got to know the highly colourful Ivan Nikolayevich Shidlovsky, subsequently a poet and church historian. Originally the name of the principal character in *The Idiot* was to be Shidlovsky, and when responding to Vladimir Solov'yev's request in 1873 for some biographical material for an article, Dostoevsky enjoined him to mention his friend. "Make sure you mention him in your article. It does not matter that no one knows of him and that he has not left behind a literary legacy. I beg you, my dear chap, mention him – he was a *major* figure in my life, and deserves that his name should live on." Dostoevsky attended the Engineering Academy from January 1838; unfortunately his brother Mikhail had failed to qualify for entry. The gruelling, soul-destroying military regime was to a large extent relieved by the company of close and devoted friends, the writer Dmitry Vasilyevich Grigorovich being one of them. It was he who first noted Dostoevsky's reticence and unsociability, and who later recorded the tumultuous effect upon Dostoevsky of his rift with Belinsky and his circle, particularly with Ivan Turgenev.

The vast bulk of information on Dostoevsky's early life comes from the *Reminiscences* of his younger brother Andrey. He was an architect, and also a meticulously scrupulous and tidy worker in everything he undertook. His *Reminiscences* are well executed, detailed and informative. Quaintly, and for an architect not inappropriately, the

book is conceived as a mansion, and the chapters are termed *rooms*.

### *Early Literary Works*

Dostoevsky's first literary projects were conceived at the Engineering Academy. In 1841, at a soirée organized by his brother Mikhail, Dostoevsky read out excerpts from some of his dramatic compositions – *Mary Stuart* and *Boris Godunov* – none of which have survived. On graduation, and having served just under a year in the St Petersburg Engineering Corps, he resigned with the rank of senior lieutenant (*norychik*) to devote himself entirely to literature.

His first published work was a translation of Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, which appeared in 1844. In the winter of the same year he started writing the epistolary novel *Poor People*. Dmitry Grigorovich and the poet Nikolai Nekrasov were so taken with it that they spent the night reading it in manuscript. They then headed for Belinsky's and on the doorstep announced, "We've a new Gogol!" to which Belinsky retorted, "Gogols sprout like mushrooms with you!" But having read the work, his enthusiasm knew no bounds: "The novel reveals such profundities of characters and of life in Russia as no one had ever dreamt of before." It was accepted for publication by the *St Petersburg Anthology*, edited by Nekrasov. The praise lavished on the novel obviously went to Dostoevsky's head, because he requested that each page should have a black border to make the work stand out; the astonished Nekrasov refused point blank, and it was published without the borders. It was an overnight success.

At the end of 1845 at a soirée at Belinsky's, Dostoevsky read out selected passages from *The Double*. Belinsky was quite interested at first, but later expressed his disapproval. This marked the beginning of the rift between the two men. Dostoevsky took it very badly and, stressed as he was, the very first symptoms of epilepsy, which were to plague him for the rest of his life, began to manifest themselves.

### *Arrest and Sentencing*

In spring 1847 Dostoevsky began to attend (on a far from regular basis) the Friday meetings of the revolutionary and utopian socialist Mikhail Petrashevsky. The discussions, which included literary themes, bore on the whole a political and sociological slant – the

emancipation of the serfs, judicial and censorship reforms, French socialist manifestos and Belinsky's banned letter to Gogol were typical subjects of debate. In 1848 Dostoevsky joined a special secret society, organized by the most radical member of the Petrashevsky Circle, one Nikolai Speshnev, by all accounts a colourful and demonic figure, whom Dostoevsky imagined to be his Mephistopheles. The society's goal was to organize an insurrection in Russia. On the morning of 23rd April 1849, the author, together with other members of the group, was arrested and confined in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Many of them, including Speshnev, found themselves depicted twenty-three years later in the pages of *Devils*.

After eight months in the fortress, where Dostoevsky wrote his story *The Little Hero*, he was found guilty of "plotting to subvert public order" and was initially sentenced to death by firing squad, which was at the last moment commuted to *mort civile*, amounting to four years of hard labour and subsequent conscription into the army. His experiences as a convict in the Omsk Fortress are poignantly recorded in *Notes from the House of the Dead* (1860–62) and the theme of execution itself is treated in some detail in *The Idiot*.

After January 1854 Dostoevsky served as a private in Semipalatinsk, eastern Kazakhstan. Even before his departure for the army, he wrote to Natalya Dmitrievna Fonvizina, the wife of one of the Decembrists (members of the ill-fated uprising in December 1825):

I seem to be in some kind of an expectation of something; I can't help feeling I'm ill, and that soon, very soon something decisive will happen. I feel that I'm approaching a turning point in my life, that I've reached a state of maturity and am on the verge of something peaceful, blithe – perhaps awesome – but certainly inevitable.

### *Maria Dmitrievna*

These were prophetic words. Almost immediately on arrival in Semipalatinsk he made the acquaintance of a minor clerk, Alexander Ivanovich Isayev, an impoverished customs-and-excise officer and alcoholic, and his wife, Maria Dmitrievna. Mrs Isayeva was then twenty-nine years old. Dostoevsky fell head over heels for her, although his love was not always requited and she considered him to be "a man with no future". He was no doubt attracted by what he perceived to be her vulnerability and spiritual defencelessness.

Dostoevsky's own life was not the happiest, and the two revelled in bouts of self-pity. And then came a terrible blow: Isayev was transferred to Kuznetsk, some six hundred versts from Semipalatinsk. Dostoevsky took the parting indescribably badly.

### *Marriage Proposals*

In August 1855 Maria Dmitrievna informed Dostoevsky that her husband had passed away. She was in dire straits – alone, without means, in an unfamiliar town, without relatives or friends to help her. Dostoevsky proposed to her immediately, but Maria Dmitrievna demurred. He realized, of course, that it was his own lowly status that was at the root of the problem. However, with the death of Nicholas I and the enthronement of Alexander II, there was hope in the improvement of the fate of the Petrashevtsy convicts. In December 1855 he was made a warrant officer; this elated him so much that in early 1856 he wrote to his brother of his intention to tie the knot: "I've taken my decision and, should the ground collapse under me, I'll go through with it... without that, which for me is now the main thing in life, life itself is valueless..."

Dostoevsky was so desperately short of money that he implored his brother for a loan of 100 roubles or more, or as much as he could afford. Begging for money was to become a way of life for Dostoevsky. Almost in desperation, he made a daring move. Having obtained official leave to go to Barnaul, he took a secret trip to Kuznetsk. But, to his surprise, instead of being greeted with love and affection, he found himself in a situation such as is depicted in *White Nights* and *Humiliated and Insulted*. Maria Dmitrievna flung her arms round his neck and, crying bitterly and with passionate kisses, confessed that she had fallen in love with the schoolteacher Nikolai Borisovich Vergunov and was intending to get married to him. Dostoevsky listened in silence to what she had to say, and then sat down with her to discuss her prospective marriage to a man who had even less money than he, but had two incontestable advantages – he was young and handsome. Maria Dmitrievna insisted the two rivals should meet and, like the Dreamer in *White Nights* and Ivan Petrovich in *Humiliated and Insulted*, Dostoevsky decided to sacrifice his own love for the sake of others. This fairly bowled Maria Dmitrievna over: Dostoevsky wrote to Wrangel, quoting her words to him: "Don't cry, don't be sad,

nothing has yet been decided. You and I, and there's no one else.' These were positively her words. I spent two days in bliss and suffering! At the end of the second day I left full of hope..."

But he had scarcely returned to Semipalatinsk when Maria Dmitrievna wrote to him that she was "sad and in tears" and loved Vergunov more than him. Dostoevsky was again absolutely distraught, but still found it in him to continue to stand by the love of his life. He would seek to obtain for her an assistance grant on the basis of her deceased husband's government service record, try to enrol her son in the cadet corps and even assist Vergunov in securing a better position.

### *Marriage to Maria and Return to St Petersburg*

In those turbulent times, when Dostoevsky imagined he had lost Maria Dmitrievna for ever, there was suddenly new hope. On 1st October 1856 he was promoted to officer, and his dream of being able to return to St Petersburg became a distinct reality. It is unlikely that this was the only cause – Maria Dmitrievna had probably always loved him after a fashion, though obviously never as strongly as he loved her – but her resistance to him suddenly broke down to the extent that Vergunov simply melted into the background and was heard of no more. Later that month Dostoevsky went to Kuznetsk, sought and obtained Maria Dmitrievna's hand and was married to her on 6th February 1857.

His happiness knew no bounds, but a major blow was just round the corner. On their way back to Semipalatinsk, when the newly-weds had stopped in Barnaul, Dostoevsky, as a result of all the emotional upheaval, had a severe epileptic fit. This had a shattering effect on Maria Dmitrievna. The sight of her husband staring wildly ahead, foaming at the mouth and kicking convulsively on the floor must have been disconcerting and frightening in the extreme. She burst into tears and began to reproach him for concealing his ailment. He was actually innocent; he had been convinced that what he suffered from were ordinary nervous attacks, not epilepsy – at least that's what doctors had told him previously. All the same, he hadn't told her even that much.

They settled in St Petersburg, but the local climate was too uncongenial for her, and she moved to Tver. From then on they saw each other only sporadically, moving, as they did, from town to town

and from flat to flat. On 7th June 1862 he made his first trip abroad – alone. He felt he had his own life to lead. Maria Dmitrievna had little to do with it, and she was fast approaching death as she had contracted tuberculosis.

### *Maria's Death*

Dostoevsky returned to Russia in September. At the beginning of November 1863 the couple settled in Moscow. Maria Dmitrievna was fighting for her life, but on her deathbed she was getting more and more irritable and demanding. Dostoevsky looked after her assiduously, yet at the same time he was riveted to his writing desk. Her suffering and moodiness are reflected in the description of Marmeladov's wife in *Crime and Punishment* and of Ippolit in *The Idiot*. Maria Dmitrievna died on 14th April 1864.

### *More Literary Works*

On his return from Siberia in 1859 Dostoevsky published *Uncle's Dream* and *The Village of Stepanchikovo*, neither of which met with much success. *Notes from the House of the Dead* began its life in 1860 in the daily newspaper *The Russian World* (Русский мир), but only the introduction and the first chapter were printed, for Dostoevsky had to keep a wary eye on the censor, as he had pointed out to his brother Mikhail in a letter in 1859: "It could all turn out nasty... If they ban it, it can all be broken up into separate articles and published in journals serially... but that would be a calamity!" Chapters 2–4 were published in subsequent issues in 1861, but it was serialized no further in *The Russian World*. With some notable alterations, the early chapters were reprinted in the 1861 April issue of *Time* (Время), a journal he founded jointly with his brother, and the concluding chapter of Part II came out in May 1862. Certain passages, deemed subversive, were excised on the grounds that "morally regressive individuals, who are held back from crime by the severity of punishment alone, may be misled by the *Notes* to form a distorted impression as to the lack of efficacy of the legally prescribed sanctions" (Baron N.V. Medem, Chairman of the St Petersburg Board of Censors.) *Humiliated and Insulted* was also serialized in *Time* during 1861, and *Notes from Underground* in *Epoch* (Эпоха), the second journal that the Dostoevsky brothers had founded

in 1864.

In 1866 Dostoevsky was in dire financial straits and, in what could have been a moment of carelessness, but more likely for fear of being thrown into a debtors' jail, he concluded one of the most dishonest and unfavourable contracts in recorded literary history. The other contracting party was the publisher Fyodor Timofeyevich Stellovsky, by all accounts a ruthless and unprincipled money-grubber. According to the terms of the contract Dostoevsky had to deliver a brand-new novel by 1st November 1866, or lose all rights in all his subsequent compositions for a period of the next nine years. Dostoevsky was to receive three thousand roubles, but contingently on the new novel being completed and delivered within the prescribed period. Over half of this money was already spoken for; it was needed for the discharge of promissory notes, the irony being that most of these – unbeknown to Dostoevsky – were already in Stellovsky's hands. The wily Stellovsky knew perfectly well that Dostoevsky was a sick man and that the epileptic attacks, which occurred on a regular basis, made him unfit for work for days on end; besides, he was also aware that Dostoevsky was committed to completing *Crime and Punishment* and would be unable to write two novels simultaneously. It was very much in Stellovsky's interests that the contract was not fulfilled.

### *Crime and Punishment and The Gambler*

Right up to the end of September Dostoevsky worked flat out on *Crime and Punishment*. This was a novel on which many of his hopes were pinned. It was to be a heavyweight: most of the fiction he had written previously was shot through with humour and had a tongue-in-cheek quality about it, but for whatever reason his best efforts had failed to find wide acceptance, let alone a demand for more either from the public or the critics. He was not giving his readers what they wanted, so *Crime and Punishment* was to change all that. But then came the end of September, and not a word of the contractual novel had yet been penned. The significance of this suddenly hit him. The as yet non-existent – and very likely to remain such – novel was, not inappropriately, to be called *The Gambler*. His friend, the writer Alexander Milyukov, on hearing the sad story, suggested that a few of his fellow writers should pool their efforts and write a chapter or so each, the more so since Dostoevsky had already sketched out a plan;

or, if he didn't wish to sacrifice that plan and wanted to keep it for his own use later, they'd work out something new themselves.

Dostoevsky declined, saying that he wouldn't put his name under anything he hadn't written himself. Milyukov then came up with the idea of using a stenographer. It was thus that the twenty-year-old Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina, who by chance had just recently completed a course in the new-fangled (for Russia, at all events) skill of stenography, came on the scene. They started work on 4th October 1866, and on 30th October the manuscript was ready for delivery, the deadline being midnight.

But Stellovsky had one more dastardly trick up his sleeve. He arranged to be out of his office on the day, and there was no one to receive the manuscript. On legal advice, they found out that it would be enough for the script to be lodged at a police station and signed for by a senior officer. Dostoevsky and Snitkina rushed to a police station, and luckily found an officer – usually, come the afternoon, senior officers were in the habit of disappearing without notice. Even so it was not till after 10 p.m. that they obtained the sought-after receipt. And so the novel – a manic, surcharged paean to reckless abandon and desperation – was finished from scratch in twenty-six days flat.

### *Marriage to Anna Snitkina*

Dostoevsky married Anna Snitkina, twenty-five years his junior, on 15th February 1867. Exactly two months after their wedding, they both went abroad. Anna had taken charge of Dostoevsky's business affairs efficiently, and by and large successfully. She was proving herself indispensable on a second major front, making up for Dostoevsky's inadequacy in dealing with day-to-day practical affairs. But there was a limit even to her frugality, acumen and, above all, the positive influence she could exercise, when she encountered Dostoevsky's incurable penchant for gambling. This had manifested itself during his previous European tour with his mistress Apollinaria Suslova, immortalized as the enigmatic tease in *The Gambler*, whose story Anna was herself ironically obliged to set down on paper from the lips of her future husband.

While gambling with the devil-may-care Apollinaria had a romantic edge to it, indulging the habit on honeymoon with his level-headed, home-making wife Anna – impecunious as they were – became a cruel

and pathetic, not to say sordid, human tragedy. He would find himself down to the last penny, dashing over to the tables, staking that very penny, losing it, running back home to pawn his cufflinks, his last remaining possessions, his wedding ring, his winter overcoat, his young wife's lace cloak, on his knees in front of her, beating his breast, with tears in his eyes accusing himself and imploring for forgiveness, and yet begging for just another louis or two from their common purse to go and break even. And it was in these circumstances, his frame continually convulsed by epilepsy, constantly on the move across Europe – like a veritable Flying Dutchman, flitting from one foreign resort to another – that he deliberated over, planned and eventually completed *The Idiot*. Not least of his handicaps was separation from Russia and its living language, which he himself considered essential in maintaining the momentum of his creative process.

### *Children*

On 5th March 1868 the couple experienced their first joys of parenthood with the birth of their daughter Sofia, but two months later followed the devastating blow of the infant's death on 24th May. On 26th September 1869 their second daughter Lyubov was born (d.1926). The Dostoevskys had two more children: Fyodor, born 16th July 1871 (d.1922), and Alexei, born 10th August 1875, who died before he reached the age of three on 16th May 1878.

On their return from abroad to St Petersburg the Dostoevskys were beset by creditors for debts incurred before their departure. Fortunately the plucky and quick-witted Anna was able to fight them off, and the author went on to embark upon and complete the last four of his great works more or less undisturbed. *Devils* was published in 1871; *The Writer's Diary* was begun in 1876 and, at intervals, continued till 1881; *The Adolescent* came out in 1875, followed by *The Karamazov Brothers* in 1880.

### *Address at the Pushkin Memorial and Rivalry with Turgenev*

On 8th June 1880 Dostoevsky delivered his famous speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin memorial in Moscow, organized by the Society of the Friends of Russian Letters. It had a most electrifying

effect upon his audience, and has been subsequently referred to as “well nigh the most famous speech in Russian history”. Tolstoy declared it a farce, and point-blank refused to attend. It therefore fell to the two remaining pillars of Russian literature, the arch rivals Dostoevsky and Turgenev – who had had it in for each other ever since they first met some thirty years previously – to occupy the centre stage.

Of the two, his imposing, patrician physical presence aside, it was Turgenev who, by dint of his reputation abroad, coupled with his progressive, enlightened Western ideology at home, felt that precedence to occupy the throne of Russian literature should be accorded to him, rather than to the reactionary, stick-in-the-mud Slavophile Dostoevsky. Moreover the replies to such RSVP messages as had been received from Western celebrities, notably Victor Hugo, Berthold Auerbach and Alfred Lord Tennyson, were all addressed to Turgenev – doubtless confirming him as the only Russian writer known abroad – though it later transpired that all three prospective guests from abroad had politely declined the honour to attend.

Still, home-grown honours were not to be spurned, and the two writers, in true prize-fighter fashion, retired to their respective camps to prepare and hone their speeches – Turgenev to his magnificent country seat Spasskoye-Lutovinovo, Dostoevsky to his modest house in Staraya Russa.

The festivities were spread over two days. Turgenev spoke on 7th June, Dostoevsky on the 8th. Of all the numerous speakers on the occasion, it was only Turgenev’s and, above all, Dostoevsky’s performances that have gone down in history. Turgenev, ever the aristocrat, did not indulge in any personal gibes in his speech. But what he did, as far as Dostoevsky was concerned, was equally hurtful. Having given Pushkin his rightful due, he permitted himself to express some doubt as to whether the author of *Eugene Onegin* might be regarded as a truly national and consequently world poet such as Homer, Shakespeare and Goethe. This question, Turgenev remarked, “we shall leave open by and by for now”. Subsequently, in his letter home to his wife, Dostoevsky remarked that Turgenev had humiliated Pushkin by depriving him of the title of national poet.

Dostoevsky himself was not present at this speech – he had been preparing his own. His famous speech was given the next day. He

delivered an electrifying performance, passionately arguing for the greatness of Pushkin as *the* national writer. He claimed that Pushkin was not only an independent literary genius, but a prophet who marked the beginning of Russian self-consciousness and provided the paramount illustration of the archetypal Russian citizen as a wanderer and sufferer in his own land. Dostoevsky's speech culminated in a plea for universal brotherhood and was met with rapturous applause.

That evening, Anna Grigoryevna records in her *Reminiscences*, after Dostoevsky returned to his hotel late at night, utterly exhausted but happy, he took a short nap and then went out to catch a cab to the Pushkin Memorial. It was a warm June night. He placed a huge laurel wreath at the foot of the memorial and made a deep, reverential bow to his great mentor.

### *Later Works*

On his return from Moscow in the summer of 1880, Dostoevsky embarked on a burst of writing activity that knows no precedent in Russian literature. In the course of a few months he finished the bulk of *The Karamazov Brothers*, continued his *Writer's Diary* and kept up an intensive correspondence, all the while suffering shattering, debilitating fits of epilepsy. But it was not all doom and gloom. The summer of 1880 was particularly warm, perhaps reminding him of gentler climates. His correspondence, going back to these balmy, final days, is characterized by being written in bursts – several letters at a time without a break – during strategic gaps in his work. On completion of *The Karamazov Brothers* in 1880, Dostoevsky made far-reaching plans for 1881–82 and beyond, the principal task being an ambitious sequel to the novel; yet at other moments at the end of that year, he confessed to a premonition that his days were numbered.

### *Death*

Tolstoy, says Igor Volgin, left the world defiantly, with a loud bang of the door, which reverberated throughout the world. By contrast, Dostoevsky's death was very low key. The author Boleslav Markovich, who came to see Dostoevsky just before he died, wrote: "He was lying on a sofa, his head propped up on a cushion, at the far end of an unpretentious, dismal room – his study. The light of a lamp, or

candles, I can't remember, standing on a little table nearby, fell directly onto his face, which was as white as a sheet, with a dark-red spot of blood that had not been wiped off his chin... His breath escaped from his throat with a soft whistle and a spasmodic opening and shutting of his lips." Dostoevsky died on 28th January 1881, at 8:36 p.m., according to Markovich's watch.

### *Legacy*

Dostoevsky's own universal legacy is, of course, indisputable, in the way that Shakespeare's is – meaning that, adulators aside, both have their eminent detractors too. Henry James, Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence, to mention but three, famously disliked Dostoevsky.

Among the lesser known of Dostoevsky's legacies in the West is what is termed in Russian *достоевщина* (Dostoevshchina). A dictionary definition of *достоевщина* would be: psychological analysis in the manner of Dostoevsky (in a deprecating sense); tendency to perversion, moral licence and degradation in society. This topic falls outside the scope of this account, but readers of his novels would see how in a traditional society, dominated by religion, such as was the case in nineteenth-century Russia, and also in the eyes of such fastidious arbiters as Turgenev, his repeated delving into the seedier aspects of human behaviour could easily attract severe censure. It is therefore fitting to end with the words – expressing Dostoevsky's essential ambiguity – of Innokenty Annensky, one of Russia's foremost Silver Age poets and literati: "Keep reading Dostoevsky, keep loving him, if you can – but if you can't, blame him for all you're worth, only keep reading him... and only him, mostly."

## Fyodor Dostoevsky's Works

### *Poor People*

*Poor People* (Бедные люди, 1846), Dostoevsky's debut epistolary novel, with which he conquered Belinsky's heart and entered upon the St Petersburg literary stage, is in choice of subject firmly rooted in Gogol. However, in emotional substance and character delineation it goes way beyond anything that the author of *The Greatcoat* ever attempted. "People (Belinsky and others) have detected in me a radically new approach, of analysis rather than synthesis, that is, I dig deep and, delving to the level of the atoms, I reach further down to the heart of the matter, whereas Gogol's point of departure is the heart of the matter itself; consequently he is less profound." Although Dostoevsky's self-analysis may not be altogether convincing, the novel itself – an exchange of heart-rending letters between two lost souls – is artistically persuasive. It is set wholly in the stifling bureaucratic, class-ridden Russia of the early-nineteenth century, but in spite of the passage of time has lost none of its universal appeal. The events could easily have been taking place in any epoch, in any society – a lowly official exchanging messages with an unfortunate, repressed female living in the house across the way.

### *The Double*

Dostoevsky's next major work, *The Double* (Двойник, 1846) is by any standards a most unusual and inventive piece of novel writing. According to Dostoevsky's own evaluation, it was "ten times better than *Poor Folk*". This opinion, however, was not shared by the vast majority of contemporary critics, who had trouble accepting its blend of fantasy and realism. Mr Golyadkin, an ordinary, perfectly unremarkable, naive and helpless nineteenth-century man, is overwhelmed by the pace of progress in a modern metropolis with all the latest waterproof galoshes, open-plan offices, luxury soft-sprung carriages, dazzling gas streetlights and the hectic pace of social life all round, and begins to inhabit another world or, to put it in clinical

terms, slowly but surely to lose his mind. The author does not state this in so many words – Mr Golyadkin’s mental disintegration is never explained or accounted for. The reader is plunged *in medias res* into a mad world from the word go. As a result Golyadkin’s predicament gains in authenticity because specifics do not stand in the way of the reader identifying himself with the hero; each one of us can supply our own catalogue of examples that threaten our sanity and therefore there is a pervasive atmosphere of “there but for the grace of God go I”.

*The Double* was hugely controversial, and on the whole was pronounced to be stylistically inadequate, a judgement with which Dostoyevsky himself tended to agree, though with important reservations. In 1846 he wrote to his brother: “absolutely everyone finds [*The Double*] a desperate and unexciting bore, and so long-drawn-out it’s positively unreadable. But, funnily enough, though they berate me for bringing on tedium, they all, to a man, read it over and over again to the very end.” This very early novel was already full of innovative, arresting characteristics: agitated, strained dialogue, always disordered, always rambling; madness predominating over method; a perplexed, pathetic soul cruelly disorientated amid confused perspectives of time and place; heart-rending tragedy compounded by a welter of manic Hollywood-type slapstick comedy – this off-the-wall tale of galloping schizophrenia took contemporary readers by storm and left them quite bewildered. Some critics hailed *The Double* as profound, others found it so permeated with the mentally aberrant spirit of Gogol’s story ‘The Diary of a Madman’ that it was no longer a question of influence, but of blatant imitation. However, if it was imitation, it was imitation of the highest order.

Like much in Dostoevsky, *The Double* was too far ahead of its time, and it would only find a reading public ready to appreciate and enjoy it to the full much later. For Vladimir Nabokov, who was no fan of Dostoevsky, *The Double* was “the best thing he ever wrote... a perfect work of art”. Time and again Dostoevsky expressed, probably under the influence of outside pressures, his intention to “improve” *The Double*; a partially revised version appeared in 1866.

### *Netochka Nezvanova*

*Netochka Nezvanova* (Неточка Незванова, 1849), a novella which was

originally conceived as a full-length novel: in its present form it should be considered as an unfinished work. Dostoevsky deals here with what was to become one of his favourite themes – the psychology and behaviour of an unusually precocious child. The plucky child-heroine Netochka has much in common with Nelly from *Humiliated and Insulted*, particularly in her capacity for boundless love, self-sacrifice and indomitable will-power. They are both fighters who refuse to succumb to life's vicissitudes whatever the odds.

Although the novella still captures the imagination today thanks to its dramatic intensity – which, for example, prompted a successful theatre adaptation at the New End Theatre in London in 2008 – it is generally considered to contain tedious and long-winded passages, which one outspoken contemporary critic, A. Druzhinin, characterized in 1849 as reeking of perspiration. These words must have rankled with Dostoevsky, because he recalls them with dramatic irony in the epilogue to *Humiliated and Insulted*.

### *The Village of Stepanchikovo*

In *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (Село Степанчиково, 1859), Dostoevsky again found himself irresistibly drawn to Gogol, who had by then become an obsession. Set on a remote country estate, the story concerns a household completely dominated by the despotic charlatan and humbug Foma Fomich Opiskin, whose sententious utterance contains a good deal of satire on the reactionary Gogol. The owner of the estate, the retired Colonel Rostanov, is a meek, kind-hearted giant of a man, cruelly dominated by Opiskin. With deftly controlled suspense, the novel builds up to a confrontation between these two.

The chief asset of the work is its rich, dramatic dialogue – *The Village of Stepanchikovo* was in fact first conceived as a drama. It is through their words that Dostoevsky gives flesh and blood not only to the protagonists but also a host of unforgettable minor characters – the perspiringly loquacious and hypochondriac landowner Bakhcheyev, the literary valet Vidoplyasov, the dancing peasant household pet Falaley, the scheming poseur Mizinchikov and the unfortunate heiress Tatyana Ivanovna, touchingly confined in her fantasy world.

### *Humiliated and Insulted*

Dostoevsky was thirty-nine when in January 1861 *Humiliated and Insulted* (Униженные и оскорблённые) began to be serialized in the first issue of *Time* (Время), the literary periodical which he founded jointly with his brother Mikhail. A much revised version came out in book form in autumn of the same year. It was his fourth novel to date after *Poor People* and *The Double* (1846), and *The Village of Stepanchikovo* (1859), neither of the last two being originally designated as novels, but given the stylized titles of “poem” and “tale” (пoeстmb) respectively. However, *The Village of Stepanchikovo* and *Humiliated and Insulted* have this in common: that they were written in close succession, straight after his return from the ten-year period of penal servitude and exile in Siberia, and were meant to serve as passports for re-entry to the literary scene from which he was debarred for so long.

### *Notes from the House of the Dead*

*Notes from the House of the Dead*, literally and more accurately *Notes from the Dead House* (Записки из мертвого дома, 1862), is Dostoevsky’s fictionalized record of four years of unremitting hardship and privation suffered as a convict in one of Tsar Nicholas I’s Siberian penal institutions. In 1854 he wrote to his brother: “The different folk I met in the settlement! I lived amongst them and got to know them well. The stories I heard from the vagabonds and felons – about their nefarious deeds and gruelling way of life – would be enough to fill several tomes. What an amazing set of people!” Dostoevsky looked upon penal servitude with the eyes of an artist, making imaginative generalizations and giving the narrative a deliberately fictional intensity and tone. And yet its genre category is unclear. Without a coherent plot or storyline, it is hardly a novel. Attempts to call the work a memoir are fundamentally wrong. Dostoevsky had a particular penchant for “notes”, which is perhaps the most appropriate term.

Tolstoy had read it three times, and in a letter to the critic Nikolai Strakhov, he wrote: “I was a bit under the weather the other day and reread *The Dead House*. I’d forgotten a lot... I know of no better work in the whole of modern literature, including Pushkin... If you see Dostoevsky, tell him I love him.” In his response, Strakhov informed Tolstoy that Dostoevsky was very pleased to hear the words of praise and asked to be allowed to keep Tolstoy’s letter, only he was taken a little aback at the implied note of disrespect for Pushkin.

## Notes from Underground

*Notes from Underground* (Записки из подполья, 1864) is a work which holds an enduring fascination for critics and readers. It opens, rather famously, with a burst of angry, personal observations: "I am a sick man... a spiteful man... an unattractive man, that's what I am." Having introduced himself in this manner, the narrator describes his current situation, having retired early from a low-ranking civil-service job thanks to an inheritance that enables him to survive in misery and seclusion. He explains that, due to a heightened consciousness of his own motives and emotions, he has retreated to a life of inertia and boredom. He also expounds his theory that man, out of a desire to exercise his free will, intentionally acts against his own interest and the dictates of logic – contrary to the claims of conventional rationalist doctrine. While he exposes his arguments, the narrator frequently interpolates his imaginary audience's potential objections, and often backtracks and revises his opinions.

In the second part of the *Notes*, the narrator relates anecdotes from his past, ostensibly to illustrate the points he has made in the first part. The first story deals with his obsessive plans to get revenge against an officer who offended him by pushing him out of his way in the street. After weeks of fantasizing he finally acts by intentionally bumping into the officer, only to find, to his annoyance, that his victim is not in the least bothered by this assault.

He then tells of a farewell dinner for his former classmate Zverkov, a pompous and boastful high achiever, along with other former school friends. Even though he dislikes them all, especially Zverkov, and is destitute and shabbily dressed, he decides to attend out of spite. He is infuriated when he arrives at the agreed time but has to wait for an hour because they have neglected to tell him that they had delayed their arrival. Civilities are quickly cast aside, and he launches into a diatribe against them and mankind in general. The others leave to go to a brothel without him, and he eventually follows them, but they are gone by the time he arrives. There he meets the prostitute Liza.

The scene continues later on, in the same setting, with the narrator delivering an impassioned moralistic lecture about Liza's lifestyle and bleak prospects. She is moved by his apparent concern for her plight, and he gives her his address and leaves. The narrator begins to regret having left his details and is haunted by the possibility of her coming

to see him. When she finally does arrive, she catches him at an undignified moment, which prompts a cruel outburst from him, before he breaks down and owns up to his own sense of humiliation. She embraces him out of pity, but he cannot help taking advantage of her, and she leaves, never to be seen or heard from again. The narrator's truthful confessions end on this regretful note.

Unlike those of Rousseau and Heine, these alleged confessions are unsparing in their detail and self-criticism. The narrator parades convictions, sentiments and soul-searching observations which would normally be subconscious, or at least not consciously acknowledged by normal people.

These amount to negative attributes such as envy, jealousy, the inability to empathize, insecurity. The only positive attribute is frankness, but frankness leads the narrator to own up to and to illustrate his own self-centredness, cowardice and moral cruelty – characteristics which he suggests are the inevitable concomitants of being hyper-sensitive and over-educated. “Here,” as the underground man concludes in his *Notes*, “are *deliberately* gathered together all the characteristics of an anti-hero.”

### *Crime and Punishment*

*Crime and Punishment* (*Преступление и наказание*, 1866) is one of the four of Dostoevsky's major novels, which Nabokov referred to as “the *so-called* major novels” (my italics). The arguably much greater, but less well-known Nobel-Prize-winning author Ivan Bunin had a similarly low opinion of Dostoevsky's great novels, or novels of ideas, as they are also not infrequently referred to. Valentin Kataev recalls that Bunin raged over the hero, Raskolnikov: “Dostoevsky obliges you to witness impossible and inconceivable abominations and spiritual squalor. From here have come all Russia's ills – Decadence, Modernism, Revolution, young people who are infected to the marrow of their bones with *Dostoevshchina* – who are without direction in their lives, confused, spiritually and physically crippled by war, not knowing what to do with their strengths and their talents...”

At the heart of *Crime and Punishment* is the student Raskolnikov's premeditated murder of a miserable old woman moneylender with the manic idea that this act would somehow make him into a superman, raise him above the law and enable him to identify himself with

Napoleon. Around this idea, Dostoevsky, armed with a marvellous title, manages to spin a truly fascinating tale. Issues of crime and punishment are always calculated to arouse interest, and he manages to score some significant firsts, such as his creation of the detective Porfiry. “Wilkie Collins and Dickens portrayed Victorian detectives, but no one had yet shown the ‘master’ detective, capable of deducing facts from psychological observation: in the twentieth century the super-detective was a close rival of the criminal for the status of hero,” writes Professor Richard Peace.

### *The Gambler*

As mentioned above, Dostoevsky was addicted to gambling, and he channelled this personal experience into his next novel, *The Gambler* (Игрок, 1866). The action takes place in the spoof town Roulettenburg, where a bunch of Russian prize idlers have fetched up to feed their habit and indulge in conspiracies and sterile romantic pursuits. As was to be expected, no one gets any richer, just the opposite, and all personal relationships end in frustration and heartache.

### *The Idiot*

In a letter to his favourite niece Sofia Alexandrovna Ivanova, to whom he dedicated *The Idiot* (Идиот, 1868), Dostoevsky wrote: “I have been nurturing the idea of this novel a long time now. It is a particular favourite of mine, but is so difficult that I have not dared to tackle it... The main aim is to portray a positively good man. There’s nothing more difficult than this in the world, especially nowadays. All writers, not only ours, but even the European ones too, who tried, had to give up, for the simple reason that the task is measureless.”

The hero of the novel, Prince Myshkin, is a Christ-like figure. He is mentally distinctly unstable, indeed he brands himself an idiot. The question arises, can saintliness survive in the real world? Russia being the real world, the novel’s answer is no, because it is synonymous with some kind of mental deficiency, which is bound to lead to disaster. At the beginning of the novel Myshkin returns from a Swiss sanatorium after a lengthy treatment, hopefully on the way to complete recovery. Abroad he had witnessed public executions by guillotine, and the memories continue to haunt him, especially the

gruesome ordinariness of the preparatory ritual. What goes through the condemned man's head as he hears the swish of the descending blade? In St Petersburg he finds no solace. On the day of his arrival, without a respite, he is thrown into a vortex of events that would have unsettled a much stronger man. Representing the darker side of humanity is the volatile, passionate, reckless merchant Rogozhin, whom Myshkin gets to know on the journey. It is a fateful meeting. As the action unravels both come to grief in their rivalry and quest for happiness, Rogozhin's fate being, if anything, the more heart-rending, because he ends up with blood on his hands beside the lifeless corpse of the woman they both loved to distraction. As for Myshkin, he returns to the sanatorium, we fear permanently.

The novel is conceived on a large scale with numerous sub-plots and a host of secondary characters. True to form they are all colourfully depicted, invariably with customary Dostoevskian humour and wit. However, some critics have found the structure of the novel problematic, and it is not the most popular choice among a wider readership.

### *Devils*

In the work *Devils* (Бесы, 1871–72, also known as *The Possessed* and *Demons*), one of Dostoevsky's main concerns is nihilism: this is embodied in the novel to devastating effect through its memorable characters. The great Russian critic and novelist Dmitry Merezhkovsky argues in *Gogol and the Devil* that the suave, smooth-talking, clownish con man Chichikov in Gogol's *Dead Souls* is the devil par excellence, because he is one of us who goes about deceiving people left, right and centre with impunity, hiding under his mask of normality and ordinariness – a point worth noting in relation to *Devils*.

The novel boasts some of the most blood-curdling episodes imaginable, but at the same time the translator Michael R. Katz writes: “*Devils* is without doubt Dostoevsky's most humorous work. It has more irony, more elements of burlesque and parody, more physical comedy and buffoonery, more exaggerated characterizations and ambiguous use of language than any of his other works.” We are indeed not miles away from the Marx Brothers' *Night at the Opera*. Stepan Trofimovich Verkhovensky, with whom the novel opens and who continues to play a significant role to the very end,

can, improbably enough, be seen as a Groucho Marx figure with a touch of Don Quixote thrown in. The picture is completed with the former's inimitable screen foil Margaret Dupont, who is represented in the novel by the grand and unapproachable Varvara Petrovna Stavrogina.

Dostoevsky based his story on a Russian press report of a brutal murder by a follower of the revolutionary anarchist Ivan Bakunin. He uses that as a paradigm for depicting a ruthless nationwide conspiracy, incidentally directed from abroad, to bring down the existing order in Russia. Acts of terrorism and extreme violence are used as political tools. But the events, despite being narrated by an apparently non-committal chronicler, are by no means a factual record of reality. The highly mysterious chronicler's very protestations of veracity are a novelist's ploy to draw the reader into a fantasy world that is blatantly of his own creation. At the centre of it are the demonically beguiling figures of Nicolas Stavrogin, a self-confessed paedophiliac and sadist, and his utterly unprincipled sidekick Peter Stepanovich Verkhovensky. Besides the motif of rampant terrorism, there is the theme of suicide, not as a desperate solution out of a psychological impasse, but as a supreme manifestation of one's will.

### *Diary of a Writer*

Dostoevsky had always been keenly interested in all aspects of publishing. Even his fictional characters are bitten by the bug. Vanya in *Humiliated and Insulted* talks to a publisher or entrepreneur, as he facetiously styles him, and appears to know his role and what motivates him; Liza Drozdova in *Devils* comes up with a serious proposal to bring out a digest, "an illuminating overview" of current affairs, and she waxes lyrical over the benefits and commercial viability of the prospective undertaking. Dostoevsky himself was a prolific journalist and the founder and editor of several periodicals. Liza's idea in fact goes back to Dostoevsky's plans of 1864–65 to found *Notebook* – a fortnightly periodical which failed to materialize – and looks forward to *Diary of a Writer* (*Дневник писателя*, 1873–81), which did materialize in 1873. In both cases Dostoevsky was to be the sole contributor. It is for this reason that *Diary of a Writer* can, indeed should, be regarded as a free-standing literary work. In essence it is a ground-breaking, wide-ranging pot-pourri of all types of literary

genres, “an illuminating overview” of all that continued to preoccupy the writer till the end of his days, and some of the issues touched upon were further reflected in his Pushkin speech and in *The Karamazov Brothers*.

### *The Adolescent*

In 1876 Dostoevsky wrote: “When, about a year and a half ago, Nikolai Alexeyevich Nekrasov asked me to write a novel for *The Notes of the Fatherland*, I was on the point of starting my version of *Fathers and Sons*, but held back, and thank God for that. I was not ready. All I’ve been able to come up with so far is my *Adolescent*.”

Just as in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*, the theme of the generation gap is at the heart of *The Adolescent* (Подросток, 1875). Incidentally the narrator-hero rejoices in the name of Arkady (Dolgoruky), the same as one of the principal characters, Arkady (Kirsanov), in Turgenev’s story; the other – the more important of the two – being Yevgeny Bazarov. The similarity does not end there. Both Arkady Dolgoruky and Yevgeny Bazarov are kindred spirits, rebels at heart and ardent champions of liberalism and truth. This ideological confluence is quite remarkable because on most points the two authors could not see eye to eye at all.

Also, the theme of relationships with serf women is tackled head on by both authors, especially Dostoevsky, who of course extracts every ounce of drama from the controversy associated with such liaisons. Arkady is illegitimate: he is the son of the serf Sofia, wife of the bonded serf Makar Dolgoruky, and the gallivanting nobleman, Andrey Versilov. Dostoevsky is immediately on home ground – the trials and tribulations of a thoroughly dysfunctional family. After his wife has been taken away from him, Makar Dolgoruky leaves his village to wander off and walk the land as a penitent, surfacing only at the end of the story. Young Arkady, at nineteen – having been knocked all his life from pillar to post – is back with his biological father, whom he has hardly met since birth, eager to get to know him closely. It’s a love-hate relationship from the start: Arkady is fascinated by Versilov, and is drawn to him inexorably. Versilov shares a good few characteristics with the devil of Ivan’s nightmare in *The Karamazov Brothers*, who, in line with Dostoevsky’s intertwining of good and evil, is of quite an affable, genial sort. Arkady wants to live up to his father,

and in his young heart he nurtures a grand, but in his view eminently attainable and realistic idea. He lusts after money, and above all, power. As he says in the novel, he wants to become a Rothschild. Father and son also lust after the same woman almost to the point of committing murder. In the background there is the ever-present mother figure of the saintly, long-suffering Sofia, and what with Makar Dolgoruky bearing a strong resemblance to Father Zosima, the similarity between Dostoevsky's last two novels is striking. Yet the atmosphere is altogether different. Perhaps the chaotic, topsy-turvy, structurally unbalanced *Karamazov Brothers* is more action packed and stimulating, intellectually intriguing and humorous too, which is what counts with readers in the end, even the more sophisticated ones. *The Adolescent* is, in that case, arguably too sophisticated and refined for its own good. One way or another *The Adolescent* has been overshadowed by his other great novels both in Russia and the Anglophone West.

### *The Karamazov Brothers*

Sigmund Freud wrote that *The Karamazov Brothers* (Братья Карамазовы, 1879–80) was “the most magnificent novel ever written”. Indeed, the novel played right into his hands, above all as regards the Oedipal connection. The work blends together literature, philosophy and entertainment in a way that has held a strong appeal for many intellectual readers.

At the heart of the novel is a dysfunctional family, four sons – one illegitimate – and the father, a dissolute, cunning, mistrustful old man, who is in a running feud with the eldest over money and the favours of the local siren. The conflict gets out of hand and Dmitry Karamazov is accused of patricide. Bound up with this intense family drama is Dostoevsky's exploration of many of his most deeply cherished ideas. The novel is also richly comic and philosophically challenging. One chapter, entitled *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, in which the churchman, in a confrontational dialogue with Christ, argues that freedom and happiness are incompatible, is styled a poem, and for its content and form occupies a unique place in literature.

### *Miscellaneous Short Fiction*

This account of Dostoevsky's works is by no means exhaustive, but has had to be limited to some of the most famous and pivotal novels and novellas. During his career Dostoevsky wrote many other shorter works of fiction, not to mention articles, essays and travel writing, and among his short stories one could mention the following, among many others: *White Nights* (Белые ночи, 1848), a story of isolation and heartbreak spanning four nights, during which the protagonist realizes his love for a young girl called Nastenka must always remain unfulfilled; *The Eternal Husband* (Вечный муж, 1870), which compellingly describes a recently widowed man's encounter with his dead wife's former lover; *A Gentle Creature* (Кроткая, 1876), the tale of a widowed pawnbroker's turbulent relationship with a young customer who eventually becomes his wife; *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (Сон смешного человека, 1877), which recounts the spiritual journey of its suicidal protagonist, who finds salvation in an encounter with a young girl and a subsequent dream.

– Ignat Avsey, 2008

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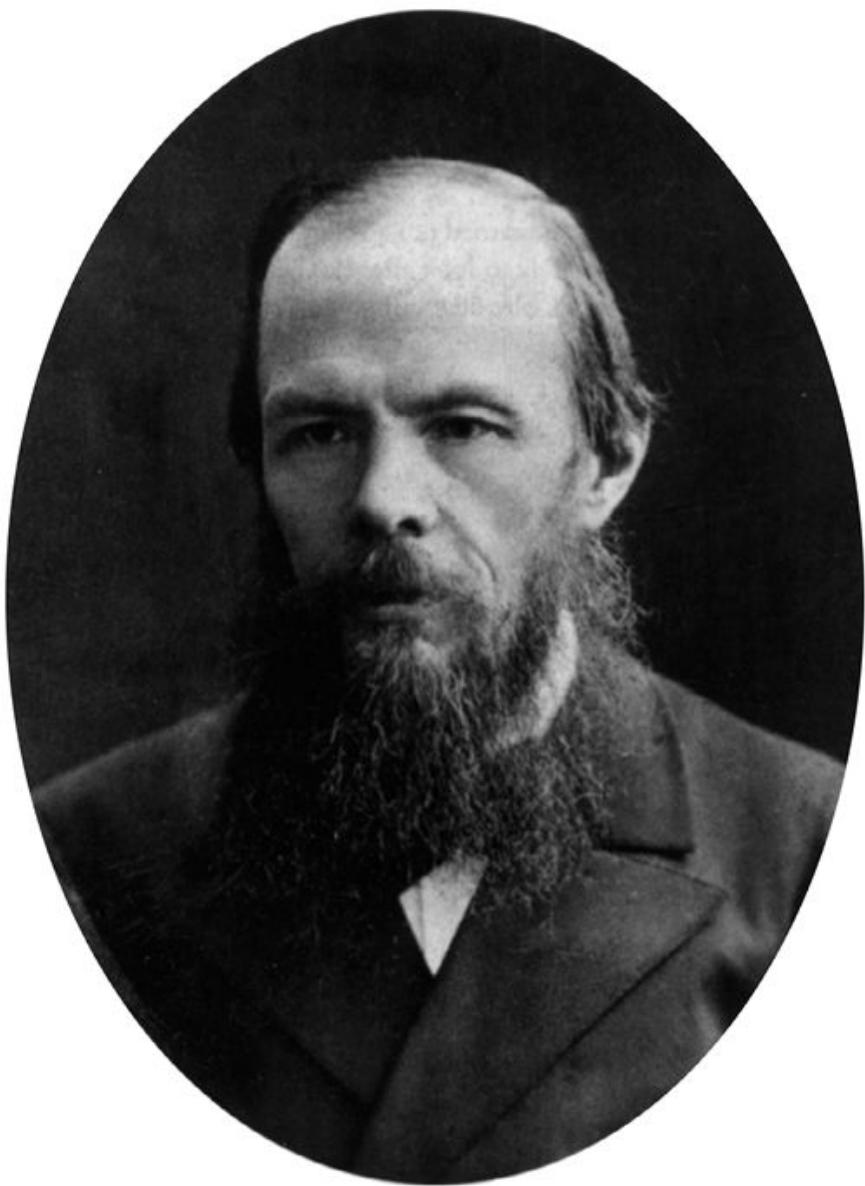
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## Illustrations



*Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–81)*



*Mikhail Andreyevich  
Dostoevsky, Fyodor's father*



*Mikhail Mikhailovich  
Dostoevsky, Fyodor's brother*



*Maria Dmitrievna  
Dostoevskaya, Fyodor's first wife*



*Maria Fyodorovna  
Dostoevskaya, Fyodor's mother*



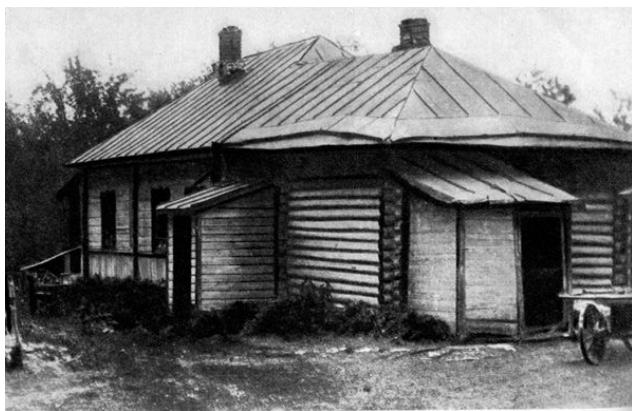
*Anna Grigoryevna Dostoevskaya,  
Fyodor's second wife*



*The Mariinsky Hospital in Moscow, where  
Dostoevsky was born in 1821*



*Apollinaria Suslova,  
Fyodor's mistress*



*The Dostoevskys' dacha in Darovoye*

# ВРЕМЯ

ЖУРНАЛ

ЛITERATURNYI I POLITICHESKIY

РЕДАКЦИЯ ПОДРУЖКА М. ДОСТОЕВСКОГО

—  
Т О М Ы 1  
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*The journal Vremya, whose offices were located in  
Dostoevsky's apartment.*



*The apartment where Dostoevsky lived from 1861 to 1863*